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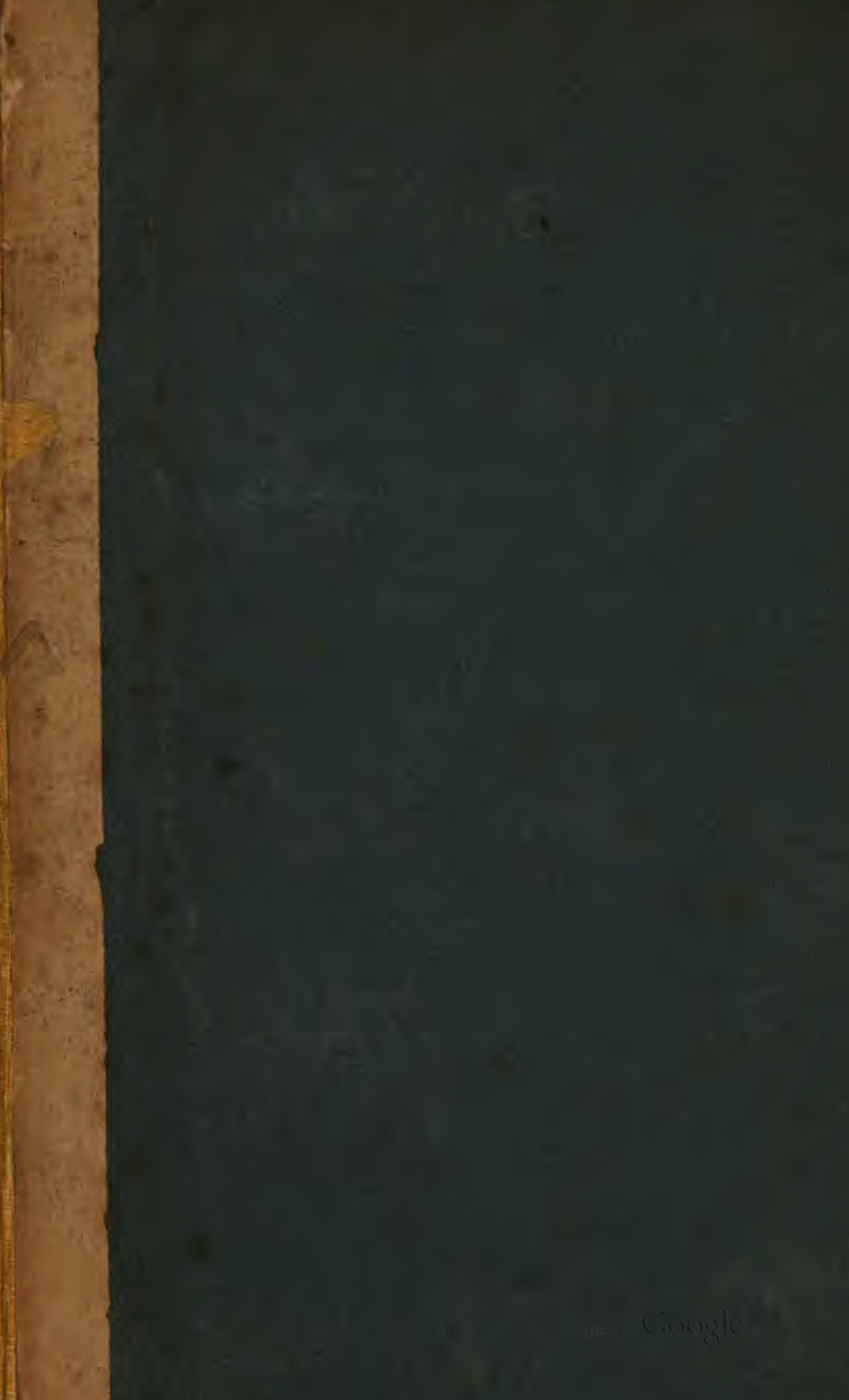
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CHURCH UNION

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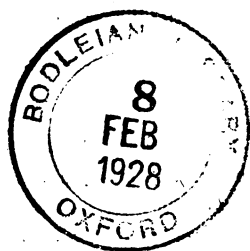
IN WHICH IT IS URGED, THAT
THE GREAT CHRISTIAN DUTY,
OF MAINTAINING
COMMUNION WITH THE APOSTOLICAL CHURCH,
REMAINS UNGANCELLED BY THE
TOLERANCE OF BRITISH LAWS.

"SAY I THESE THINGS AS A MAN; OR SAITH NOT THE LAW THE
SAME ALSO?" 1 COR. IX. 8.

BY EDWARD DAVIES,
RECTOR OF BISHOPSTON, IN THE DIOCESE OF ST. DAVID'S;
and Author of
"Celtic Researches," "The Mythology and Rites of the British Druids," &c.

London:
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1811.



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TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
HENRY, LORD VISCOUNT SIDMOUTH.



MY LORD,

As a friend to the church of England, your lordship has declared yourself *firm*, but not *intolerant*; neither deserting the cause of good order on the one hand, nor, on the other, imposing an undue restraint upon the freedom of opinion.

It is, therefore, hoped that my very act in presenting this work to your lordship, will be accepted, both as a testimony of unqualified respect and approbation, and also as the best means of communicating an immediate and general impression of the temper in which it is written.

With the highest sense of your lordship's distinguished worth, whether in public or in

DEDICATION.

private life, I have the honour to subscribe
myself, my lord,

Your lordship's most devoted,
and very humble servant,

EDWARD DAVIES,

Olveston, Dec. 12, 1810.

PREFACE.

As the rights of that civil and religious liberty, which is Britain's pre-eminent character, are sure to be urged in reply to all argument in support of our national church—to every appeal which marks the danger of separation, either licentious or needless, at the best—it is not improbable that my volume should give occasion to keen strictures, founded upon this popular basis. It is therefore expedient, that I should guard against a misconception of my object and principles, by a direct statement of the opinion, which it has been the habit of my life to entertain, upon these important subjects.

In the first place, then, I feel myself bound, as a Christian, to regulate my principles by the law of Christ, as it is declared in the *New Testament*. And it appears to me the doctrine of this book, that an orderly submission to the civil government, through all its gradations, in the *lawful* and the *regular* exercise of its authority, is *indispensable*. At the same time, I do not conceive that Christianity requires us to abandon the constitutional rights of the people, or to resign that reasonable portion of civil

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freedom, which is the patrimonial inheritance of the subject, in a limited government, like that of Britain.

St. Paul commands—*Let every soul, in the church of Christ, be subject to the higher powers!* But the same apostle is a firm and resolute assertor of his own personal freedom and privileges, as a *Roman citizen*.

Hence it may be inferred, that individuals are justified in the assertion of their liberty, so far as it is recognised by the laws of their country—so far as it may be consistent with good order, with the peace of society, and with all the respect which government claims, for its *dignity*, and for its *due effect*; but that, beyond these limits, they have no right which enables them to extend their private independence, or break the chain of just subordination.

Upon the analogy of this equitable distinction, *religious liberty* has its due and sober limits. As persecution is discountenanced in the Gospel, and is utterly disallowed, it is admitted, and, by me, unequivocally asserted, that all those who conduct themselves in society as its peaceful members, as orderly and well-disciplined subjects of the government, have a right, *as free as air*, to the unmolested enjoyment of their own opinions, and are never to incur prosecutions and penalties for their departure, in religious principles, from the national church. If they

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cannot be won by argument, they are never to be reduced by force.

But the right of argument must be admitted; were it not so, the Gospel could never have been preached at all. And as that Gospel subjects the visible church to the obligation of *definite laws*, it is the duty of all Christians to acknowledge *their* force in adjusting the limits of religious freedom—to acquiesce, with reverent awe, in the constitutions of their *great Master*, and to observe those human regulations which are implicitly ratified by *his* word, and are in perfect unison with *his* general appointments.

Thus, when the author of this volume professes himself a zealous and steady advocate of civil and religious freedom, he regards it as limited *fitly* to its appropriate sphere, and regulated by its just measure—as losing the character of a public blessing—as inverting the good order of the church, and, even, as degenerating into licentiousness, whenever it overleaps these barriers of its power.

By the most eloquent and popular advocates of liberty, these limitations are too often overlooked, and are sometimes disallowed. Hence the popular mind has been impressed with a loose and vague notion of gigantic freedom, without a definite form or lawful circumscription: and this indistinct image has caught the

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attention of many who acknowledge themselves, hitherto, as members of the established church; but whose attachment, under the baneful influence of this illusion, is wavering and undetermined. It is to persons of this character that the following discourses are more particularly addressed, in the hope of recalling their notice to the evangelical limits of Christian freedom.

It is not, however, to be supposed, that such a work may not occasionally fall into the hands of those, who no longer *halt between two opinions*, who have openly relinquished our fellowship, and have publicly declared against our principles. Here it may create a momentary displeasure.

Far be it from the author's wish to irritate or offend any man. When he uses the privilege of a British subject, in declaring his own opinion, he claims no right of imposing it upon others: he only invites them to consider, impartially, whether it may not entitle itself to their adoption, as being founded in the Gospel of Christ. He would preserve towards all men a temper of Christian charity—would live at peace with them as fellow-subjects—would cherish a due regard for them as neighbours, and as *friends*. However they may differ from him in the principles of religion, or in the form of worship, he deprecates the infringement of their liberty, and would have no weapon raised against them that

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carries with it a keener edge than *the sword of the Spirit*, that is, *the Word of God*. He has avoided all harsh expressions that are not warranted by that *Word*;—he has also forbore to attack individuals, and, as much as possible, *particular societies*. No man, therefore, who rests behind the shield of a pure conscience, can receive a wound from *his* arm.

But, as true charity is incompatible with dissimulation, he has felt it his duty, with confidence, to mark certain latitudes, in religious principles and practice, which appear *to him* dangerous in the extreme, as irreconcilable to the laws of Christ. This, however, is not a work of personal, or of public, enmity. He who warns his neighbour to beware of a fire, is not his enemy, but his friend. A peculiarity of sentiment, and of conduct, *attaches* itself to none of us. It may be relinquished or maintained, as correct principles of reasoning, or as a Christian judgment, shall direct.

It is therefore hoped these pages may be useful to the candid and the liberal, in all societies, where the religion of Christ is professed—that they may furnish *to them* occasion for serious and for dispassionate reflection, when they are asked, *if they are warranted in the liberty they use*; or, *whether inadvertence or early habit has not led them aside from the undeviating rule of faith, and the straight path of religious duty*.

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If they find they have been wrong, the church-doors are open to them ; we invite, but we do not compel them : if they can make it appear, by the Gospel, that the path in which they walk is that of life, let them proceed in it with a safe conscience, and may God's blessing attend them !

It was the author's first intention to have added copious notes, illustrating the opinion of primitive Christianity, upon the several subjects of discussion. But, as the authority of ecclesiastical writers might be converted into matter of controversy, it was judged more advisable to rest the cause of the church upon the *sole* foundation of *holy writ*, which is in the hands of the people, and is the rule to which *all Christians* make their last appeal.

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ERRATA.

Page 68, line 19, for *them*, read *themselves*.

.... 102, last line, for *enforced*, read *inferred*.

.... 158, line 24, for *your*, read *thy*.

.... 177, line 17, for *life*, read *lips*.

.... 240, line 19, for *vantey*, read *variety*.

.... 254, line 10, for *right*, read *rite*.

.... 355, line 21, for *Jehoram*, read *Jehoaah*.

.... 379, line 13, after *equity*, insert *for*.

.... 380, line 10, for *succeeding*, read *preceding*.

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SERMON I.

OF FORMING A RIGHT JUDGMENT.

I. THES. V. 21.

Prove all things: hold fast that which is good.

THAT the deliberation of human judgment has little or nothing to do in the affairs of religion, has been asserted by many professors of Christianity: whilst others, on the contrary, have maintained, that every thing must submit to the criterion of man's understanding; and that no doctrine is to be received, no precept acknowledged as binding, till its truth has been approved, and its fitness ascertained, by the light of reason. But he who embraces the Christian religion, as it has been taught by Christ himself and his apostles, cannot fully subscribe to either of these maxims.

If we admit the former, and renounce the natural direction of our reason, we can never arrive at a state of certainty and stability in

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our own minds. Our devotion must degenerate into fanaticism or superstition: we shall be compelled to wander in the dark, and *worship we know not what*. If the latter obtain our assent, it will dispose us to the rejection of every mystery which we cannot comprehend, and suggest perpetual debates against the authority of a divine revelation.

It follows, that the deliberation of human judgment, or the light of reason, must have its due place, and its proper exercise, in the affairs of religion; for by this alone we shall be qualified to comply with the apostle's precept, in *proving all things*. But it must also have its just limitations, by certain fixed and unalterable principles; otherwise we shall never know where to *stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord*; we shall want a power to ascertain, and *hold fast that which is good*.

We may, then, consider St. Paul, in this passage, as instructing the church, how to form a *right judgment*, such as is recommended by our Lord, when he says—*Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment*. And this determination of the mind is to be acquired, by

allowing reason its lawful exercise, and keeping it within its proper sphere.

The very idea of judgment implies a discrimination, and decision of the mind, agreeably to some definite rules, and certain principles. The term, indeed, is often misapplied. Men are generally disposed to dignify their own vague and accidental fancies, their mere surmises, in matters of religion, by the title of *private judgment*. But it is not every notion, adopted at random, that has a claim to this appellation. Principles must be felt, facts must be compared, and circumstances weighed, before a legitimate opinion can be formed ; and he that is incapable of this can never be the real possessor of a private judgment.

He may insist upon the right of thinking and judging for himself ; but if he does this, he must be content to abide by the consequence of his own decisions. If he judges foolishly and absurdly in his worldly affairs, he may plead a right to use his own discretion in that which concerns himself, but he cannot at the same time merit the character of a wise and prudent man ; for the thoughtless, the wavering, the capricious, whose no-

tions of the same things are variously determined, by the successive changes of their own passions, or the shifting impulse of external objects, can never be deemed men of judgment, even in civil society.

So, in religious matters, a man may allow his thoughts to wander in one devious track to-day, and in another to-morrow, as shall seem best to himself; and who can restrain him? But the guesses and surmises of such a man cannot deserve the name of *judgment*, because his mind is not under the direction of any certain and steady principles.

The question, then, is not whether a man has a physical power, or a natural right, to indulge his private notions, but whether those notions constitute a legitimate judgment consistent with his profession, and in conformity with the character which he assumes. And in the business of religion, the determination of this point is a thing of no light importance: for though the irregular bias of thought, while confined to the breast, must necessarily elude the cognizance of human laws, it is not, therefore, morally lawful; nor will it escape the notice of that Being, who is the *great searcher of the heart*. And as

the perception of certain fixed principles is an essential prerequisite to the very act of judging, so it is necessary, to the forming of a *right judgment*, that the leading principle, or rule of judging, be founded in truth ; for, without this, the mind can never distinguish and *hold fast that which is good*.

Thus, one man may have laid it down as a principle, that the world has hitherto wandered in ignorance and error, and, consequently, that reason commands him to strike out a new path diametrically opposite to the maxims which have been generally received. Another may have resolved, that the voice of reason has been audible in all ages, and in all ranks of society ; and, therefore, that nothing can be certainly right which has not obtained the common consent of mankind. With a third it may be the leading axiom, that every man is an independent agent : he therefore insists upon having an opinion of his own, and labours to display the peculiarity of this opinion as a proof of his independence ; whilst a fourth contends, that every thing ought to submit to established precedent and public authority. These men may

make the fairest deductions from the principles which they respectively acknowledge ; yet it is scarcely possible, that, upon a single question of importance, the judgment of any two of them can coincide. And, as truth is always consistent, and error various, it must follow, that three of them, at least, want a perfect rule of judging, and are under the direction of erroneous principles.

The first operation, then, of a right judgment, in matters of religion, must be to discover certain just principles, and ascertain their truth and stability. And here it might be deemed a subject of lawful deliberation, whether religion be altogether the suggestion of human reason, and, as such, adopted by all nations, in consequence of its natural and obvious fitness ; or whether it rests upon the authority of a divine revelation. But, as I address myself to those who acknowledge the name of Christians, I shall not go back to this question, but take it for granted that the historical facts of our canonical Scriptures are admitted, at least, in general terms. It is still, however, the province of a right judgment, to determine, from internal and

external evidence, the question of the sacred authenticity of these Scriptures, and of their genuine derivation from the God of Truth.

And when this is decided in their favour, as we will suppose it must be upon impartial investigation, the next operation of a right judgment is, to compare the several parts of these Scriptures with each other, and ascertain their true meaning and design. Here the candid inquirer will take especial care, not to be led by the doubtful construction of a sentence, or the mere sound of words, to set one portion of Scripture against another, or to interpret a few passages in opposition to the general tenor of the whole: for right reason will not hesitate in confessing, that *the Spirit of God is the spirit of truth; and that truth is always consistent with itself.*

It is also the office of a right judgment *truly* to distinguish between those ordinances and precepts which are of a local and temporary nature, and those which are of universal and perpetual obligation; and to be careful that neither private interest, the bias of temper, popular opinion, nor the prejudices of education, have any corrupt influence upon its decisions.

When judgment, rightly exercised, has proceeded thus far, it will have obtained a leading principle, whereby to regulate its own operations in particular cases. It will, henceforth, possess a general rule, whereby to *prove all things*, and to ascertain *that which is good*. It will also begin to perceive the legitimate bounds of its own deliberation: for *the word of God is not to be disputed by man*. If he who judges *righteous judgment*, and holds fast that *which is good*, remarks, in this word, some doctrines which are above his comprehension, he will, notwithstanding, acknowledge the obligation of receiving them, as they are delivered, with reverence and respect; because God is wiser than man. If he discover some precepts and ordinances, for which he cannot assign an obvious and adequate reason, he will, nevertheless, submit to the duty of observing them with humility; because they are stamped with an authority which is not to be controverted by the children of the dust.

Here the situation of the devout inquirer into the principles of religion may be illustrated by a comparison with the orderly

subject of a civil state, whom we will suppose to have been informed, that a certain law is in force, and has been established by the constituted powers. He is not bound, by his allegiance, to admit the existence of such a law upon vague report: it is his just privilege to inquire for an authentic copy. But when this has been procured; when he sees and recognizes the name and stamp of his sovereign, and all other marks of genuineness, which candour is entitled to demand; when the law comes with these credentials, it must be received in its full extent and operation.

The same person now exercises his reason in the attentive examination of this law, in order that he may be guarded against an undesigned offence, and may learn how far he is affected by its injunctions and provisions. Here he perceives some regulations established, which his own judgment would not have suggested, and some clauses which seem to bear hard upon his individual interest. But private judgment and interest must submit: the whole is ratified by an authority which it is his duty to acknowledge and to respect. Having ascertained

this fact, he feels that his deliberation is at an end. His neighbours may devise schemes of evasion, and contrive various means to elude the effect of every clause which comes near to their own interest ; but the rectitude of his judgment, and the integrity of his conscience, will not permit him to follow their example. Such men, he clearly perceives, forfeit the character of good and orderly subjects, and are therefore justly exposed to the penalties of disobedience.

So, if a man acknowledge the authority of HIM, by whom the holy Scriptures are given, it is the part and province of a right-judgment to *prove all things*, by consulting the Scriptures themselves, by seriously weighing and examining the important contents of those sacred records. And the necessity of performing this duty with diligence and sincerity must appear, when we consider that many who, in general terms, readily acknowledge the truth and sacred authority of the Old and New Testament, have greatly erred, either through ignorance of their main design, or the perverse application of particular pas-

sages. An apostle of our Lord has declared, that, in the Epistles of St. Paul, there are *some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction.* (2 Pet. iii. 16.) Here we are taught that the Scriptures have their difficulties ; that, without serious attention and singleness of heart, they may be misunderstood and perverted ; and that this perversion of the Scriptures is a matter of no common moment — since they who thus misuse the word of God, which was designed for their salvation, even while they acknowledge its general authority, and presume that it has decided in their favour, make it the instrument of their own destruction.

It is, therefore, the part of a right judgment to ascertain, by diligent and impartial inquiry, what God has revealed and commanded, and what he has not. And this exercise of reason is expressly enjoined in the Scriptures themselves.

Thus, Isaiah says—*To the law, and to the testimony : if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.* (Isaiah, viii. 10.) And again—*Seek*

ye out of the book of the Lord, and read.
(xxxiv. 6.)

Our Lord gives this instruction to the Jews — *Search the Scriptures: for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me.* (John, v. 39.) It was not sufficient, then, that the truth of the Scriptures should be generally acknowledged; they were also to be examined with diligence, that their testimony might be distinctly ascertained. Accordingly, when the doctrine of Christianity was first proposed to the men of Berea, they are commended as being *more noble or generous than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind—with an openness to conviction—and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.* (Acts, xvii. 11.) It is, therefore, a lawful and necessary exercise of reason, to examine and identify the contents of the Holy Scripture. Thus far the operation of human judgment properly extends; but beyond this it has no right to deliberate. The word of God is sacred. It must be received *intire and uncontaminated.* Wherefore Moses, in the last book of the law,

where he recapitulates the ordinances of God with their awful sanctions, gives this charge to the Israelites—*Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it; that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you.* (Deut. iv. 2.)

And again—*What thing soever I command you, observe to do it; thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.* (Chap. xii. 32.)

As he had said in another place—*Ye shall observe to do as the Lord your God hath commanded you. Ye shall not turn aside to the right hand, or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you, that ye may live.* (Chap. v. 32, 33.) St. John likewise, in that book, and that very chapter, which closes the canon of Scripture, *testifies unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man should add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the word of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the*

things which are written in this book.
(Rev. xxii. 18, 19.)

These books must, then, be received without addition, diminution, or perversion: and it must be the province of a right judgment to resolve, that, as the other books of Scripture are stamped with the same divine authority, this rule must be extended to the whole: and so it is repeatedly declared. God says to Joshua—*Observe to do according to all the law, which Moses, my servant, commanded thee; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left.* (Josh. i. 7.) Agur testifies, in the book of Proverbs—*Every word of God is pure; he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.* Wherefore this prohibition follows—*Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.* (Prov. xxx. 5, 6.) Our Lord reproves the Jews, because *they had made the commandment of God of none effect, by their traditions; and declares, that in vain do they worship God, teaching, for doctrines, the commandments of men.* (Mat. xv. 6, 9.)

In another place, he cites against them a sacred truth, which they themselves

verbally acknowledged—namely, *That the Scripture cannot be broken.* (John, x. 35.)

St. Paul testifies of himself and his brother apostles—*We are not as many, who corrupt the word of God : but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in Christ.* (2 Cor. ii. 17.) Having received the ministry of the Gospel, they were not walking in craftiness, or handling the word of God deceitfully, but, by manifestation of the truth, commending themselves to every man's conscience, in the sight of God. (2 Cor. iv. 1, 2.)

The same apostle denounces a solemn curse upon any man, or even an angel from heaven, who should preach any other Gospel than that which the church of Christ had received from his appointed ministers. And this curse extends to any teacher whatsoever, who should add to, diminish from, or pervert the true spirit of that Gospel, which is delivered to us in the records of the New Testament.

And lest the judgment of the church should be corrupted by the infusion of any false principles—by any thing that might tend to efface the authority revealed

truth, it is seasonably guarded by this emphatical charge—*Beware lest any man spoil you, through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.* (Col. ii. 8.) And of such importance is the observance of this caution, that the same apostle earnestly repeats the charge to his beloved convert, the Bishop of Ephesus—*O, Timothy ! keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science, FALSELY SO CALLED, which some professing, have erred concerning the faith.* (1 Tim. vi. 20, 21.)

Thus it appears, that the light of reason has no authority to alter or pervert the truth, as it is revealed in the word of God. And to him who resolves, under the direction of a right judgment, *to prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good*, this must be a self-evident proposition ; for the philosophy and boasted science of man must fall infinitely short of *his* wisdom, by whose inspiration the holy Scripture was given. It is, therefore, the duty of every one who professes the Christian religion, to acknowledge

that the Scripture contains the sacred rule of faith, and of religious deportment. But, to the well-being of a Christian church, and to the preservation of due order amongst its members, many internal regulations are necessary, beyond what the Scripture has expressly defined, or particularly declared. And such things, a right judgment will deem to be more within the sphere of human deliberation, than those definite truths and sacred precepts which bear the seal of divine authority. Yet still, he who forms a right judgment, will be under the direction of some fixt and accurate principles. He will perceive, that the laws of order, which are summarily laid down in the Gospel, have been unfolded, and more fully brought to view, in the constitution of the primitive and apostolical church. And hence he will acknowledge, that the internal regulations of a church of Christ, its form of worship, and rules of discipline, must, in no respect, be contrary to the word of God; and that, agreeably to the injunction of this word, *all things must be done decently, and in order, and to general edification*—to the training up of the members of that church,

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according to the perfect model laid down by the apostles of our Lord.

Notwithstanding, therefore, the disciples of Christ may justly claim a right of deliberation, in such matters, they cannot, under the direction of a right judgment, rashly suggest a mode of worship upon the plan of novel fancy, or individual conceit. As the advancement of true religion, and the preservation of good order, are the ends to be aimed at, it will be necessary to observe the fundamental laws of the Gospel, on the one hand; and, on the other, to acknowledge some lawful and competent authority, in the visible church. And, in order to ascertain what authority may be deemed lawful and competent to the maintenance of good order, it must be the obvious resource of a right judgment, to contemplate, with respect, the constitution of the primitive churches, which were founded by the apostles of Christ, and to pay a due regard to such regulations as obtained a general consent amongst them, and which, therefore, appear to have existed from the age of their first establishment: for true piety, under the direction of

a right judgment, will not disallow that mode of worship, that law of order, which was of apostolical institution. It is, then, requisite, in order to the forming of a right judgment in matters which pertain to the Christian religion, to have a sacred regard to the Holy Scriptures, and a steady attention to the model of the primitive and apostolical church. These were the great principles upon which our pious forefathers judged and acted, in the reformation of our national church. And whilst we adhere to the same principles, we cannot want means to support the steadfastness of our own minds, or a rule, to prove, and judge of, the various doctrines and suggestions of men. This may be explained by the consideration of a few particular cases: thus,

If the professed infidel deny the evidence of miracles, or, in order to shake our faith, controvert the possibility of any great event, recorded in the scripture, as the immediate act of God; a right judgment, established upon just principles, will resolve, that the Almighty Being, who, without controul or competition, constituted the laws of nature according to his own will, has a

power to suspend those laws, whenever, for wise and good purposes, he sees proper so to do ; and that they can be suspended only by his hand, or with his permission. A right judgment will not deem it necessary to inquire, by the instrumentality of what means could such a miracle be performed. It will rest satisfied with the conviction, that God, and God alone, had the power to perform it ; and with a confident dependance in the truth of his word, that this power was exerted.

If the philosopher, resolving all the obligations of religion into a natural apprehension of the difference of good and evil, should impose the doctrine, that nothing more is required of man, than piety towards God, integrity in his dealings with mankind, and decency of private conduct, agreeably to this moral apprehension, and the interpretation of his own conscience ; he who has formed his judgment upon the authority of a divine revelation, cannot but perceive the defect of such instruction : for the moral sense, which is natural to man, must be common to the Christian and the pagan, to the savage and the sage. Universal

experience, therefore, demonstrates, that it is subject to a thousand perversions, under the influence of ignorance or of prejudice. Hence, no man can be a disciple of Christ, unless his *moral apprehension*, and his *conscience*, be in *subjection to the revealed word of God*. Great is the difference between the untutored child of nature, who listens to the dictates of his own heart, and the member of civil society, who regards the constituted laws of good order : greater still is the distinction between the mere moralist, and the real Christian.

If he who styles himself a *rational* Christian, maintain the absurdity of believing the doctrine of the Trinity ; the man of a right judgment clearly perceives, that the unity of the godhead, and the divinity of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, are truths expressly declared by the infallible word of God : he, therefore, receives these truths, and rests in the assurance, that God is wiser than man.

If the same philosophical teacher deny the doctrine of the atonement, by the vicarious death of Christ, the man of a right judgment perceives, that such a doctrine is

agreeable to the general sense of all nations, declared by their expiatory sacrifices—that a divine revelation, in which the truth is ascertained, was not designed for philosophers alone, but for all the gradations of human intellect—that the Mosaic law, which was dictated by the divine Spirit, as introductory to the Gospel, enjoined expiatory rites, by the vicarious blood of victims—that these victims were only types of Him that was to come and make a perfect atonement—and that the completion of this atonement, by the blood of Christ, is expressly declared in that Gospel, which every true Christian must receive, as the sacred rule of his faith.

If the political reformer maintain, that all power originates in the people, and therefore that the people have a right to resist or displace all constituted authority, by the exertion of their physical force, or the balance of their own numbers; the judgments of men, upon such a proposition, may be variously determined; whilst their principles are various and uncertain. But, that such doctrine is utterly inconsistent with Christianity, must be immediately perceived by

him, who judges by the word of God, where his duty, in such cases, is already fixt and determined; since we are, by that word, commanded and taught—*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God. The powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist, shall receive unto themselves damnation.* (Rom. xiii. 1, 2.)

Should the votary of a tyrannical superstition, upon the strength of such declarations of Scripture, urge the necessity of acknowledging the one, visible, head of the church, and of receiving his doctrines, together with his authority; he who has formed a right judgment perceives, that the authority of this presuming head was never lawfully established—that 'Christ has reserved to himself the prerogative of being the supreme head and director of his church—that he declares the mutual relation of his apostles, or stewards, to be only that of *brethren*—and that Christ's authority, as supreme director, has never ceased;

since he has promised to be with his church *always, even unto the end of the world.* (Mat. xxviii. 20.)

It must follow, that the acknowledging of any other supreme director in the church, is setting up an usurpation, in opposition to a lawful and existing authority. And this, no Christian is permitted to do.

But, it will be said, *The Pope's authority has been acknowledged.*—This is admitted.—The usurper may take the city by surprise, and the citizens may be compelled, for a time, to bow to his power. But he is not, therefore, the lawful governor. His act is an act of rebellion. His expulsion is always lawful: for the Prince of the Covenant, to whom our ultimate allegiance is due, still remains amongst us. Under his glorious banner, the usurper has been expelled. And, together with his claim of authority, his unfounded doctrines have justly been rejected; for a solemn anathema is pronounced upon any man, or angel, who shall presume to teach any other gospel, than that which the church of Christ did receive, as taught by his apostles. And,

from the operation of this sentence, the Pope and his councils can plead no exemption.

If the visionary enthusiast, presuming upon his immediate inspirations, condemn the use of premeditated discourses, and a public liturgy ; he who rightly judges, by the rule of God's word, and the example of the apostolical church, is ready to answer, that no immediate suggestions, of the spirit of God, can be discordant with those truths, which it has already declared, and with that law of good order which it has established in the written word—and, that no man can be required to receive any doctrine, as the immediate suggestion of the Spirit, which is not confirmed by the evidence of miracles, or the gift of prophecy.

And, as to premeditated discourses, and public liturgies, they had their place in the early ages of the apostolical church, where they were admitted for the purpose of avoiding fanatical effusion, and obtaining the common consent of the ministers and people, in their addresses to Almighty God.

If one separatist, humbly lamenting the tenderness of his conscience, and another boldly insisting upon the freedom of opinion, reject the fellowship of the established church, and seek the truth of the Gospel, from those pastors who, in their several conventicles, plead a secret and special call to the ministry; the man who has rightly formed his judgment upon the authority of the word of God, and the example of primitive Christianity, will, in vain, be invited into their society, whilst he sees that the church of Christ was constituted as one undivided body—that those who, upon the like frivolous pretences, forsook the fellowship of that body, who either renounced its faith or despised its discipline, were not, during the primitive and purer ages, even ranked under the name of Christians; but were regarded by the whole apostolical church, as *heathen men, and as publicans*: and that, in the age of the apostles, and in every age of the true church, no man could be duly acknowledged as a minister, who did not derive his authority, by public and official appoint-

ment, from the apostles of Christ, and therefore from Christ himself, the great shepherd of the universal flock.

Many cases of a parallel nature might be specified : but let these suffice, as examples of the application of a right judgment, in *proving all things* ; and of its invincible force, in *holding fast that which is good*.

Upon the whole, then, we may conclude, that human judgment, or the light of reason, has its due place and office in the affairs of religion ; but that, notwithstanding this, its lawful operation is bounded by certain fixed and determined limits : that the plea of private judgment cannot be allowed to a professed Christian, unless he judge fairly and consistently upon Christian principles ; and that a discriminative acknowledgment of the divine authority of the Holy Scripture, and a respectful attention to the constitution of the primitive and apostolical church, are leading principles, necessary to the forming of a right Christian judgment.

Let us, then, implore the Giver of every good gift, for his grace, to employ our natural powers, with diligence and sincerity, in the examination of his sacred word, and

the discernment of those laws of order, which tend to the edification of his church, *that we may, henceforth, be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine; but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ!*

And may God grant us, by the divine light of his blessed Spirit, to have a right judgment in all things, that we may evermore rejoice in his holy comfort, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour!—
Amen.

SERMON II.

OF THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF THE NEW
TESTAMENT.

I COR. II. 5.

That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

IN the records of the New Testament, we have a history of the life and miracles of Jesus Christ, together with an account of certain precepts, which he enjoined to his disciples, and a certain system of doctrine, which, through them, he taught to the world. And whosoever admits the truth of these records, even in the most general way, is bound to acknowledge, with the Jewish doctors, that Christ was *a teacher come from God, because no man could have done those works which he did, except God were with him.*

But, as the books of the New Testament are not transmitted to us in the *writing of Christ himself*, but in that of his apostles, and other disciples, there is room for in-

quiry, as to the degree of credit which they justly demand. It is, therefore, expedient for every one who receives the system of doctrine which these writings disclose, to satisfy his own mind, whether they are to be admitted in their full and literal interpretation ; whether we must allow them the same extent of authority, as if they had come from the pen of the divine Teacher ; or whether we may interpret them, with some degree of latitude, as the testimony of men who, notwithstanding they had a predominant regard to truth, were yet liable to error, and might have been deceived in some particulars : and if so, whether we may not, lawfully, select certain parts of these records, as our rule of faith, and adjust them to our own conceptions, of what is fit and reasonable ; whilst we reject other parts, as not approving themselves to our private judgment. And such an inquiry is, in some respects, become necessary, as several professors of Christ's religion have entertained, and taught, various opinions upon this important subject.

Whilst some regard the writings of the apostles and evangelists, as the inspired

and infallible word of God, which we must receive, in its full and literal meaning ; there are others, who speak of the authors of these writings, merely as the attendants of Christ in his public ministry ; as men who, having seen his works, and heard his doctrines, declared the things that they had seen and heard, with candour and openness, and, to the best of their ability, with accuracy and truth. And this they are acknowledged to have done, with such sincerity of zeal, and conviction of the certainty of their report, that they hesitated not to lay down their lives in confirmation of their testimony.

But, at the same time, these publishers of the Gospel, and founders of the Christian church, are represented as persons of mean acquirements, ignorant and unlearned, and, as they candidly acknowledge, of like infirmities with ourselves. And these defects and infirmities, it has been maintained, affected their ministry and doctrine ; so that, without impeaching their integrity, we may fairly doubt of the accuracy of their testimony, in certain particulars, and bring their doctrine to the test of private judg-

ment. From this view of the subject has arisen that system which assumes to itself the title of *rational christianity*.

But, if this notion of our sacred records—this controul of human reason, over their divine authority—be admitted, it must follow, that the *faith of Christians stands in the wisdom of men*; whereas St. Paul contends, that it should not stand in human wisdom, but *in the power of God*. And I trust that, upon due consideration, we shall agree with the apostle; and shall acknowledge, that the history and doctrines of the New Testament resolve themselves into plain declarations of the will, the power, and ordinance of God, made under the direction of his Holy Spirit; and are, therefore, to be received in their genuine import, without variation or abatement.

For, in the first place, it will be admitted, that our Lord chose his apostles as authorised vouchers for what he did and taught; and that, when he departed from the world, and ascended to the Father, he committed to them the superintendence of his visible church. And, whatever the natural infirmity of these apostles, or their personal dis-

advantages, may have been, one fact is clear, namely, that it was the will of Christ, that his Gospel should not be published by vague report, or proclaimed by any missionaries who were not fully competent to the task.

This precaution, so necessary to the establishing of an unshaken faith in the truth of the Gospel, and so essential to the very being of a Christian church, appears upon many occasions. Thus we find him continually charging those men, upon whom he had wrought the miracle of healing, *that they should tell no man what he had done for them*. The intent of these prohibitions must have been, that there might be no premature, or imperfect rumour of his actions, till his great plan should have been completed, and he should have *brought forth judgment unto victory*. These men, indeed, published everywhere the great things that Jesus had done for them; but this publication was without commission, and against the express command of their divine benefactor.

In like manner our Lord declares that, in the office of his public ministry, *he was*

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not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Matt. xv. 24.) This house alone had an opportunity of discerning and recognizing, in his person, the character of their expected Messiah. They were the heirs of the promise which God had made to their fathers, saying unto Abraham—*In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.* They were the children of the prophets. Amongst them were publicly read, and with professed reverence and devotion, those predictions which foretold the mission, and described the character of Christ. They were also under a particular covenant of works, the terms of which they could not fulfil; and therefore waited for their justification, by the perfect obedience of HIM, concerning whom it was written, in their own Scriptures, that *he was coming to fulfil the will of God.* And, at this very time, they were earnestly looking for his appearance.

When, therefore, Christ was sent to the House of Israel, he was sent to a people who might be expected to have a right apprehension of his character and office. This people, seeing the miracles which he did

in his Father's name, and the accomplishment of their ancient prophecies, ought, surely, to have acknowledged the arrival of their long-promised Messiah, and to have received the Gospel with all readiness of mind. Whereas, on the contrary, had he appeared immediately to the gentiles, who were bewildered in the errors of polytheism, his character and person must have been utterly unknown to them. His miracles and doctrine, without due preparation on their part, would, in all probability, have been misunderstood, and could only have served to increase their delusion.

In Christ's primary mission, therefore, to the house of Israel, we perceive the direction of the divine will, that no imperfect impression of his character and office should go into the world; and that his Gospel should not be exposed to misrepresentation, by vague and uncertain report. The same care appears upon another remarkable occasion. Our Lord having demanded of his apostles, their opinion of his character, Simon Peter answered, *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.* Jesus applauding this true confession, said

unto him, *Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven.* This was, then, the true faith, upon which the church was to be established: but it is added—*Then charged he his disciples, that they should tell no man that he was Jesus, the Christ.* (Matt. xvi. 16.)

These apostles were the chosen witnesses of our Lord, set apart for the propagation of that very faith which they had now confessed. Why are they, then, forbidden to publish *that he was the Christ?*

To this question it may be replied, that, although the apostles had been nominated to the office of propagating the Gospel, they had not, as yet, received their commission to enter upon this office, nor do they appear to have been duly prepared and qualified for the discharge of their important trust. They had not, as yet, been witnesses of all that Jesus did and taught: and they had not overcome certain prejudices, which they had imbibed in common with their countrymen, who expected that their promised Messiah would appear as a mighty and victorious temporal prince. Had they,

then, at this time, been permitted to publish those truths which they had already learned, the imperfection of their knowledge would have exposed them to the danger of debasing their doctrine with some portion of error. Our Lord, therefore, *who came to bear witness to the truth*, prohibits their proclaiming his character, till they should be more fully instructed in the nature of his religion, and should be otherwise duly qualified for the sacred office which they were to undertake. Thus it appears to have been the will of Christ, that his Gospel should not be published by vague report, or proclaimed by any missionaries who were not fully competent to the task.

And here, it must be conceded to our adversaries, that the apostles, in the early stage of their discipline, laboured under some peculiar, and many common infirmities, which disqualified them for the work to which they were called. Let us consider what these were.

One of the greatest infirmities of the apostles consisted in the pertinacious retention of a false opinion, which they held, in common with the Jewish nation, rela-

tive to the character of Christ, and the nature of his kingdom. It was under the influence of this opinion, that this people rejected our blessed Lord; that, *when he came to his own, his own received him not.* The house of Israel, overlooking those prophecies which described the humble and afflicted condition of the Messiah at his first advent, turned their views only to some glorious and triumphant prince—a prince whose great achievement it should be, not so much to redeem them from their iniquities, as to instate them in the temporal sovereignty of the promised land, and to subdue all nations to their dominion.

Of the prevalence of this opinion amongst the people at large, we have a striking proof in the conduct of the five thousand, whom our Lord had fed by a miracle. No sooner were they convinced, by this exertion of the divine power, that *Jesus was the Christ, or that prophet that should come into the world,* than they attempted to take him by force, and make him a king. (John, vi. 14, 15.)

And such, evidently, was the idea of the multitude which preceded and followed

our Lord at his entry into Jerusalem, *cutting down branches from the trees, spreading their garments in the way, and shouting—Blessed be the king that cometh in the name of the Lord!* and, *Blessed be the kingdom of our Father David!* (Luke, xix. 38, &c.) And we find the evangelist, St. John, implicating himself, and his fellow apostles, in the common error. *These things, says he, understood not his disciples at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him.* (John, xii. 16.)

The same expectation, of an earthly dominion, was cherished by the apostles during the whole period of our Lord's ministry: for, after his crucifixion, we hear them saying, in despair, *We trusted that it had been he, which should have redeemed Israel.* (Luke, xxiv. 21.) And, after his resurrection, they ask him, *Lord, wilt thou, at this time, restore the kingdom to Israel?* (Acts, i. 6.) To this persuasion we must refer the disputes which had arisen amongst them, respecting precedence in their Master's kingdom, (Matt. xviii. 1, &c.); as well as the am-

bitious request of the sons of Zebedee, that they might have the privilege to sit, the one at his right hand, and the other at his left, in his kingdom. (Matt. xx. 20.)

In all these instances, we perceive in the apostles a prevailing misconception of the nature of Christ's kingdom, and of the duty and office to which they were called. And, in addition to this, many remarkable proofs of the common infirmities of man have been pointed out in their character: such as the spirit of revenge, which would have called down fire from heaven, to consume their adversaries—that weakness and timidity which compelled them all to forsake their Lord and fly, when he was taken by the Jews—that panic, which induced Peter to deny his master, with oaths and execrations—that despondency, which they all betrayed upon his death, and their unbelief of his resurrection, notwithstanding Christ himself had, by his express and repeated instructions, prepared them for these events.

We must, then, admit: from all this it appears, that the apostles were, naturally, subject to the common infirmities of our lives, and that they laboured under some

prejudices, which were peculiar to their own age and country. And, if it be true that they carried these disqualifications into their ministerial office, we must also allow that their records and doctrine ought to submit to the selection and modification of human judgment; and, consequently, that our faith stands not in the power of God, but in the wisdom of men. It is, therefore, of moment to enquire, whether these infirmities were not so overruled, that we shall be compelled to acknowledge the divine power and direction in the work of their ministry.

And here, we must recollect, in the first place, that the apostles did not enter upon their sacred charge by mere accident. They were not undisciplined mechanics, who took upon themselves the office of the ministry, as their constitutional zeal prompted them, and exercised that office under the influence of a heated imagination, or private ambition. They had studied for years, under the most competent of teachers; and to his school they were not rashly or indiscriminately admitted. Our Lord declares, that they were ministers chosen of the Father, and given to the Son,

for the execution of a charge, to which they were divinely and expressly appointed. Hence he says—*I have manifested thy name, unto the men which thou gavest me, out of the world. Thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.* (John, xvii. 6.) And being thus pre-ordained by the Father, they are nominated and appointed by the Son, with the most sacred solemnity. *Jesus went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God: and when it was day, he called unto him his disciples, and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.* (Luke, vi. 12.) Which term, *apostles*, implies persons who are duly authorised to bear the mandates of their superior. In this appointment, we perceive the care of the divine providence, that the Gospel should not be exposed to the danger of misrepresentation, in the hands of accidental and unqualified teachers. Its publication was, exclusively, committed to those who had been *chosen before of God*—whom the Son of God received of his Father, and set apart, as his authorised missionaries—as his confidential stewards, under whose direction

his universal church was to be established. To this trust they were solemnly and publicly ordained, upon the prayer of Christ, to his Almighty Father : and his prayer was not in vain.

Let us, in the next place, observe the course of discipline and instruction by which these chosen missionaries were prepared for their office by their divine Master.

As the Jewish people, in addition to their errors and prejudices, manifested a spirit of the most determined perverseness and inveterate obstinacy, and thus *rejected the counsel of God against themselves*, our Lord, whose maxim it was, *not to give that which is holy unto dogs, or to cast pearls before swine*, did not explain to these persecutors and scoffers the mysteries of his religion. He taught them only in parables, that, *Seeing, they might see, and not perceive ; and hearing, they might hear, and not understand* : thus guarding against the promulgation of his doctrine by men of perverse and prejudiced minds.

But with the apostles it was not so. After they had been nominated to their

office, we are told, that *Jesus went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God; and the twelve were with him.* (Luke, viii. 1.) Nor were they taught in parables like the multitude; for, *When Jesus was alone with them, he expounded all things to them, declaring, that unto them it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.* (Matt. xiii. 11.) Well, then, might he add, upon this occasion—*Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear!*

From this school of wisdom, they were sent forth to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, to proclaim that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*; to prepare the Jews for the candid examination of that evidence, which was offered to them in the works of Christ, and which proved the certainty of his mission from God. The apostles were not, as yet, fully commissioned to preach the Gospel. They had not received authority to proclaim *that Jesus was the Christ*. But this, their limited charge, was impressed and ratified with a seal from heaven; *They*

had power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease. (Matt. x. 1.)

Hence the *woe* denounced against that city which should refuse to receive them, or to hear their words. And their message, thus confirmed by miracles, was to be received as the word of God : wherefore our Lord says—*He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.*

With such powers were the apostles entrusted during this stage of their discipline ; but we must still acknowledge that they were not, as yet, duly qualified for the general charge of proclaiming the Gospel. They were not fully apprised of the character and office of the Messiah, and of the nature of his kingdom.

Their divine Teacher, from the beginning of his ministry, published the approach of the kingdom of heaven : he also said to his apostles—*Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Luke, xii. 32.)* And again—*I appoint you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed me. (Luke, xxii. 29.)* And, in

another place—*Ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* (Matt. xix. 28.) Yet still it must be admitted, that in all *those days when the Lord Jesus went in and out amongst them, they were not duly qualified to explain to the world the form and constitution of that kingdom.* Notwithstanding the doctrine and the example of Christ, and the evidence of those prophecies which declared the nature of his government, the apostles kept pertinacious hold of the general mistake of their countrymen, and cherished the persuasion that the Messiah, at his first advent, was to be a temporal prince of the Israelites. And though they loved and revered their divine Master, they could not hear, with patience, even from his mouth, any thing that opposed this their governing prejudice. To give one instance of this: we are informed, that, from the time when they confessed their belief that he was the *Christ, the Son of the living God; Jesus began to shew unto his disciples, that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many*

things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. This was instructing them in the doctrine of a persecuted and suffering Redeemer; but here the strength of their prejudice, and their aversion to such doctrine, immediately appear in the answer of Peter:—*Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee!*

Thus, it must be granted, that the natural powers of the apostles, with all the advantages of our Lord's public ministry, whilst operating upon those powers alone, were insufficient, wholly, to subdue their prejudices, and bring them to a right apprehension of the duty and office to which they were appointed.

Called, as they were, not into the kingdom of a triumphant prince, but into the ministry of a persecuted church, where they would be exposed to scorn, to affliction, and to death, we must confess it was requisite; before they were sent forth upon their commission, that they should receive some more effectual qualification, that their minds should be enlightened, and their prejudices wholly subdued. Otherwise, it may justly

be urged, that their doctrine must submit to the controul of human judgment ; and, consequently, that our faith must stand, not in the power of God, but in the wisdom of men.

But it appears, from the whole tenor of the Gospel, that these *faithful and wise servants, whom their Lord made rulers over all his household*, the church, did receive a qualification, which was abundantly sufficient ; even the support and plenary inspiration of the Holy Ghost. It was this that constituted them *ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God*. For they pretend not to be *sufficient of themselves to think any thing as of themselves*, but acknowledge that *their sufficiency is of God, who hath made them able ministers of the New Testament*. (2 Cor. iii. 5, 6.)

This endowment of the spirit our Lord had repeatedly promised to his apostles ; but it was not given to them till after he had ascended to his Father. For the gift of healing, which was committed to them when Jesus sent them forth upon a special commission, was only a divine attestation of the truth of their message, and was dis-

ting in its measure, from that complete inspiration, which was to direct their judgment in all things; since we find that they did not, as yet, rightly understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

Our Lord, indeed, charges his disciples *not to premeditate their defence, in the time of persecution*; and adds this gracious promise—*It shall be given you in that same hour, what ye shall speak: for it is not ye that speak, but the spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.* This passage, however, does not refer to a measure of the spirit, which they had already received; but to that full demonstration of the power of God, which was promised to them after his departure: for it must be remarked that, previous to the ascension of Christ, the apostles had not been exposed to persecution. And so the matter is explained by St. John—*This spake he of the spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.* (John, vii. 39.) Of this plenary inspiration, and the extraordinary effects it was to produce, our Lord gave frequent intimations to his

apostles: Thus—I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth. Ye know him, for he dwelleth WITH you, and shall be in you. (John, xiv. 16, &c.) Again—The Comforter, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name; he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Here we find that the instruction and inspiration of the Holy Ghost, which the apostles had not yet received, were to be expected as necessary qualifications for their evangelical testimony, and the work of the ministry.

The same appears from other passages, such as the following—But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me; and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning. (John, xv. 26.)

Thus, notwithstanding the apostles had been with our Lord from the beginning of his ministry; had seen his miracles, and

attended to his instructions ; we find they were not authorised to *bear witness of him* upon the strength of their own natural powers, or to become publishers of the Gospel, before they should have received the Spirit of truth. And, as Christ himself declares, the endowment of this Spirit was requisite, to give them a right apprehension of his doctrine : for he tells them—*I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all truth : for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak ; and he shall shew you things to come.* (John, xvi. 12, 13.)

And, as the endowment of the Spirit was requisite, not only for the propagation, but also for the right apprehension of the Gospel, our Lord does not authorise his apostles to enter upon the work of the ministry, till they should have received this divine assistance. *And behold*, says he, just before his ascension—*behold I send the promise of my Father upon you ; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be en-*

dowed with power from on high. (Luke, xxiv. 49.)

It is in reference to this final instruction that St. Luke^s speaks of the *day in which our Lord was taken up, after that he, THROUGH THE HOLY GHOST, had given commandment unto the apostles whom he had chosen. (Acts, i. 2.)*

And then he adds, that, being assembled with them, he commanded them, *that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me : for John truly baptized with water ; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence. And yet further—Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you ; and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight.*

Here we perceive that the general commission of the apostles did not open till after

the ascension of Christ. They had been nominated and appointed to the great charge of publishing the Gospel ; but they had not received the power by which they were to execute this charge. They were not authorised to testify of HIM, till they should have been *baptized with the Holy Ghost* ; because the faith of Christ's church *was not to stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*

Accordingly, the apostles did not enter upon their public ministry, but *continued in prayer and supplication, in a private room*, till this divine promise had been fulfilled. They ventured upon no ministerial office, excepting the election of a fellow-witness of Christ's resurrection, in the room of Judas. And this they did, not by a deliberative act of their own judgment, not by a claim of any supernatural illumination, or by any official power which had been hitherto committed to them ; but, *with prayer, they gave forth their lots*, and resigned the choice to God alone, who knoweth the hearts of men. But, as it was of essential moment, that the faith of the church should not stand in the wisdom

of men, but in the power of God, the promise of the Father was fulfilled in due time; and that, not in a secret or doubtful, but in the most public and notorious manner. *When the day of pentecost was fully come, the apostles were all, with one accord, in one place; and suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting: and there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire; and it sat upon each of them: and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts, ii. 1—4.)* Then was verified that saying of the Lord, *It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.*

Henceforth we behold the *able ministers of the New Testament*, and the authorised *stewards of the mysteries of God*. St. Peter no longer betrays that terror and human frailty, which had lately compelled him to deny his master. He boldly declares, before the multitude, the subject of the apostolical mission, and the power with which it was ratified. *This Jesus,*

saith he, *hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.* And he spoke with such demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that three thousand persons were converted at one time.

Notwithstanding, therefore, our adversaries must be allowed to plead, that the apostles were, naturally, frail and fallible; notwithstanding it must be admitted, that they shewed marks of this human infirmity, during the whole period of our Lord's public ministry; yet it must be maintained, that they did not carry their infirmities into their evangelical testimony, or into the duties of their sacred office.

These men, fore-ordained of God; diligently instructed by the Son of God, and solemnly appointed to the charge of superintending his church; were not authorised to take this sacred charge in hand, or to proclaim the Gospel, till they had received the plenary inspiration of that divine Spirit, which guided them into all

truth. It is not they that speak ; it is God that speaketh in them. Their word, therefore, is the word of God : and woe to that man who shall add to it, or diminish from it: for, in so doing, he offendeth not against fallible men, but against the Holy Ghost. Wherefore our Lord saith to his apostles, *He that heareth you, heareth me ; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me ; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.* (Luke, x. 16.)

Hence St. Paul, recognising this divine authority, and maintaining the dignity of his apostolical character, declares to the Thessalonians—*He, therefore, that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit.* (1 Thess. iv. 8.)

Let us, therefore, my brethren, revere the records, and receive the precepts and the doctrine of the New Testament, wholly, as they are given to us, without prevarication, without wavering ; being fully assured, that *our faith* in the testimony of the apostles and evangelists *stands not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.*

SERMON III.

OF APOSTOLICAL AUTHORITY IN MATTERS
OF FAITH.

II. COR. I. 24.

*Not for that we have dominion over your
faith; but are helpers of your joy: for,
by faith ye stand.*

It is an obvious and common remark, that the good things of this life derive their principal value from their proper application, and a temperate forbearance in their enjoyment. Thus a moderate and seasonable use of those provisions with which a kind Providence has supplied our tables, is conducive to our comfort, to the preservation of our health, and the support of our frame: but an indiscreet or excessive indulgence in the use of these very blessings, produces inconvenience, disease, or death.

The same remark may be transferred from natural to moral subjects; and it will admit of a most important and forcible illustration, in regard to that principle of re-

ligious freedom, and *toleration*, which is recognised by the laws of our land.

The proper object and design of this lenient spirit, is to discountenance, or prevent, persecution, and to secure to those who, by salutary admonition, cannot be brought and preserved within the pale of the established church—that portion of benevolence and forbearance which, from a Christian people, is due to all mankind.

It has also this good effect upon the regular members of the church, that it gives them the credit of submitting to the laws of order, not by compulsion, but from a willing mind ; since they have the power of departing from us with temporal impunity. And thus, *those that are approved amongst us are made manifest.* * Toleration, therefore, is a thing *right* in itself, with regard to those by whom it is conceded. Persecution is utterly forbidden in the Gospel, where we are commanded to be gentle to all men, to love even our enemies, and to serve God with a pure conscience.

But when men view this same toleration as authorising them, no less in a religious than in a civil sense, to withdraw from the

unity of the church, to profess what tenets they please, to frame their own faith, their own form of worship, their own rules of discipline, under the influence of private speculation, and the presumed sanction of the rights of conscience and Christian liberty, it ceases to be a blessing with regard to them ; it becomes detrimental to the harmony of society, and subversive of the very foundation of Christianity.

Notwithstanding, therefore, the tolerance of our laws arises from a true Christian principle, it behoves every professor of our holy religion seriously to consider, how far he is warranted by the Gospel to indulge in the use of that liberty which these laws have granted ; to take care, that he does not construe *civil permission* into *sacred authority*, or make the laws of the land the rule of his faith, and the measure of his profession. For we must all remember, that we shall be called to a strict account at a higher tribunal ; and that the act of toleration does not constitute the code by which we must be judged. If, in compliance with our Lord's direction, it permits the wheat and the tares to *grow together till the*

harvest, it cannot alter the nature of the one or the other ; since we are expressly taught, that they will be accurately distinguished in the great day, and duly disposed of, agreeably to the superior law of Christ.

Hence it becomes the sacred duty of every faithful minister of the Gospel, to warn his Christian hearers of the danger which may arise from a misconception of this subject : for though it is not our province to persecute the disobedient, it does not follow that we are, in silence, to pass over every irregular opinion, or disorderly practice, which may arise from an abuse of religious toleration. If the servants of the Lord are restrained from gathering up the tares before the harvest, they are not reprov'd for having distinguished them from the wheat, and marked their character : nor are they forbidden to point them out, and declare, in the words of their Master—*An enemy hath done this.*

And here we are particularly called upon to efface any wrong impression which may have been made, by the perversion of the Holy Scripture ; and to resist the misapplication of those texts which have been ad-

duced in favour of latitude in faith and doctrine, under the pretence of Christian liberty.

Amongst the passages thus perverted, I know of none upon which greater stress has been laid, by some modern separatists, than these words of St. Paul to the church of Corinth—*Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for, by faith ye stand.*

This passage has been ostentatiously brought forward, as an illustrious proof of the *liberality of the apostles*; as supplying an argument, that they disclaimed all authoritative controul over the faith of their converts, and conceded to them the full liberty of exercising their own judgment upon all *speculative* points of religious doctrine, and of regulating their conduct agreeably to such principles as they should choose to adopt: provided only that they gave a general assent to the Gospel history, as far as it approved itself to their reason, observed its moral precepts, and maintained a decency of deportment in civil society.

Such is the doctrine which has been extorted from the words of my text. But it

is manifestly contrary to other passages in the writings of St. Paul, where we find him strenuously insisting upon the purity of *one immutable faith*, the unity of the Christian church, and the maintenance of due order in that church upon Christian principles. And, not to insist upon the authority of the Spirit of truth, by which *every word is established*, it must be supposed, that the instructions of the apostles, rightly understood, are consistent with themselves; otherwise, they cannot be allowed to constitute any rule at all. It therefore follows, that no such doctrine as that which has been asserted can be implied in this place.

Let us, then, endeavour to ascertain what the words do really import. And here it must be remarked, in the first place, that our translators have not preserved the full emphasis and definite meaning of the latter clause: for, in the original, it is not said, *By faith ye stand*, but, *In the faith ye have stood*; signifying *one, definite, and determinate faith*, not *faith in general*. It is that immutable faith to which the apostle alludes in the former part of this chapter, where he says—*We write none*

other things unto you, than what ye read or acknowledge, and I trust ye shall acknowledge, even to the end. And here it is plainly admitted that the Corinthians had, hitherto, stood in this faith.

Now, to return to the text, it would be a most inconclusive mode of reasoning, and very different from the manner of St. Paul, to say, *We have no controul over your faith, because ye have stood in the faith.* The reason given clearly implies, that the apostle did possess some power of controul, and the whole period naturally resolves itself into this meaning—*We have an authority, as ministers of Christ, to superintend your faith; but, on the present occasion, it is not requisite for us to exert this power: it is our place rather to congratulate with you upon the purity of your profession, because your faith has been stedfast and incorrupt.*

It may, however, be proper to consider the words more at large, in connection with some passages to which they have a manifest reference.

St. Paul, in his former epistle, had sharply reproved the Corinthians, not for the corruption of their faith, but for several gross

offences against the laws of decency and good order. He had threatened to come to them *with a rod*, for the correction of these offences. But he delayed his journey, in the hope that his reproof would produce the desired effect of reformation. This effect was produced. And consequently, in this second epistle, we are told of the great joy which the reformation of the Corinthians afforded to the apostle, who had been waiting in earnest expectation of such a proof of their obedience, as might render it unnecessary for him to enforce the rigour of discipline. Accordingly, he says, in the verse preceding my text—*I call God for a record upon my soul, that, TO SPARE YOU, I came not, as yet, unto Corinth.* And to this he immediately adds—*Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy : for, in the faith ye have stood.* This is as much as if he had said—*I have delayed coming to Corinth, waiting for your reformation, that I might spare you that severity of censure which I must otherwise have pronounced upon your irregular conduct : at the same time I certify, that, if I had come amongst you, ye had*

nothing to apprehend from the exertion of that authority which I possess over the faith of the church : in this respect, I should only have been a promoter of your joy, because you have stood firm in the true faith of the Gospel.

So far, then, are these words from supporting the doctrine, that the apostles, and apostolical ministers, disclaim all controuling power, and authoritative superintendence, over the faith of the Christian church, that they clearly imply the very contrary.

But, lest this explication should not prove satisfactory to those who have taken up the text in a different point of view—lest the expression of *exercising dominion*, which is here employed, should be thought too strong to describe the real power of the apostles—I shall take occasion to enquire, in what sense they may be said to disclaim a *dominion* over the faith of their converts ; and what kind of authority they did assert and exercise over the whole Christian church.

Authority may be understood as either absolute or deputed. Absolute authority

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is that of a sovereign lord or prince, who asserts a power in his own right, or, by an assumed prerogative, to deliberate upon the condition of others, to enact laws according to the dictates of his own will or private judgment, and to abrogate or alter them at pleasure. Whereas deputed authority is that which pertains to a governor of a province, who acts by commission from another, whose powers are limited and defined by the terms of his commission, and who is accountable to his superior for the faithful execution of the trust committed to his charge.

Now, as Christians are the servants and subjects of Christ, it is clear that no man can assert an absolute or despotic authority over their faith or conduct, as to religious matters, without usurpation. And it is equally clear, from the New Testament, that no such optional power was claimed by the apostles, or acknowledged to pertain to them.

Our Lord charges those whom he appoints to the superintendence of his church—*Be not ye called Rabbi—my Master—for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.* (Matt. xxiii. 8.)

And in another place—*Ye know that the princes of the gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them: but it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister.* (Matt. xx. 25, 26.) Here an arbitrary or deliberative authority over the faith is expressly refused to the apostles. And they, acting under this restriction, considered themselves as not possessing a right to teach any doctrine of their own device. St. James, having exposed the error of some, who maintained that faith, without works of righteousness, was sufficient for salvation, adds this general charge—*My brethren, be not many masters*—πολλοὶ διδασκαλοὶ—*many teachers of systems—knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation: for in many things we offend all.* (Jam. iii. 1, 2.)—We are all liable to err, if we indulge in private speculations.

St. Peter thus distinguishes between the lawful authority of apostolical ministers, and that power which they were forbidden to assume:—*The elders which are among you, I exhort, who am also an elder:—Feed the*

flock of God, which is among you, taking the oversight—episcopacy—thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind: neither as being lords—absolute masters—over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. (1 Pet. v. 1—3.)

Thus it appears, that an absolute dominion over the faith of the church is utterly disclaimed by the apostles of Christ; who, nevertheless, did assert a *superintending* authority. They were not *masters*, but *stewards*: they were those *faithful and wise servants, whom their Lord made rulers over his household, to give them meat in due season.* (Matt. xxiv. 45.) ...

Accordingly, they did not pretend to the exercise of arbitrary power, but confined them to the less presuming office of acting under a limited and defined commission, and teaching only what they had received.

Thus St. Paul declares, that *he counted not his life dear unto himself, so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.* (Acts, xx. 24.)

And so far is this apostle from asserting an arbitrary dominion over the faith of his converts, or a deliberative power to modify, the doctrine of the Gospel according to the suggestions of his own mind, that he thus fully disclaims all such authority, in his first epistle to the Corinthians :—*Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful : but with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment : yea, I judge not mine own self ; for I KNOW NOTHING BY MYSELF.* (1 Cor. iv. 1—4.)

This is not the language of a man who exercises the right of private judgment over the doctrine which he teaches, or concedes to others the exercise of such a right. His authority is merely that of a minister or steward. He is responsible for the faithful execution of the charge committed to him, without addition, diminution, or perversion.

And of such importance did he esteem it, for his converts to have a right apprehension of this matter, that he frequently inculcates the same truth in this very epistle. Thus

he says—*Though I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory of, for necessity is laid upon me. Yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel. For if I do this thing willingly, I have my reward; but if against my will, A DISPENSATION OF THE GOSPEL IS COMMITTED UNTO ME.* (1 Cor. ix. 16, 17.) And again:—*Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel, which I preached unto you; which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand: by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you; unless ye have believed in vain: FOR I DELIVERED UNTO YOU, FIRST OF ALL, THAT WHICH ALSO I RECEIVED.* (1 Cor. xv. 1, &c.)

The same account of the apostle's commission is given to the other churches: for thus he instructs the Galatians:—*I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me, is not of man: for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.* (Gal. i. 11, 12.) In like manner he certifies the Colossians:—*Wherefore I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God, which is given to me, for you, to fulfil the*

word of God. (Col. i. 25.) And again, he writes to Titus,—*God hath, in due times, manifested his word, through preaching, which is committed unto me, according to the commandment of God our Saviour.* (Tit. i. 3.)

The meaning of these passages is so plain and express, that it cannot easily be evaded or misunderstood. They clearly prove, that St. Paul was so far from assuming an arbitrary and optional dominion over the faith of the church, that he did not obtrude himself at all into the ministry, till it was duly committed to his hands by a higher power: and that, when he was thus constituted a minister of the Gospel, he did not deem it lawful to teach what he pleased by the weight of his own authority; or, in a deliberative capacity, to form and modify his doctrine by the suggestions of his own mind, and the selection of private judgment. In this sense, the apostle did not assert a dominion over the faith of the church. He acknowledged the duty of receiving the Gospel as it had been given to him, and of teaching it as he had received it. He is invested with a deputed authority, under a definite and limited commission, the terms

of which he has no power to alter ;—short of which, he claims no right to stop and hesitate ; and beyond which he durst not proceed.

It is true, that examples of more despotic and arbitrary pretensions may be produced amongst professed teachers of Christ's religion, both in ancient and modern times. The prerogative of station, the secret direction of the Spirit, or the rights of private judgment, have been urged, as justifying the introduction of various tenets, and divers rules of practice, which have no authentic support in the apostolical commission, or the canon of holy Scripture.

Such was the authority assumed by the pope, and by the councils of the church of Rome, to impose the doctrine of transubstantiation, of purgatory, of the efficacy of indulgences, masses for the dead, works of supererogation, and the like. These are doctrines not officially taught by virtue of the apostolical commission, and authenticated by the Gospel of Christ, but enjoined by that arbitrary authority which a corrupt hierarchy assumed to itself.

Such, also, is the authority claimed by

various teachers of modern times, who have invested themselves with the ministerial office. Of these there are multitudes who persuade their disciples, that it is no sin to withdraw from the unity of a church, which has been established upon apostolical principles, and the model of the primitive and purer ages of Christianity. And this they do, under the pretence of the rights of private judgment :—I call it a *pretence* ; for it is nothing more. When the *sect* is once formed, the right of judging is taken from the individual, and lodged in the society at large, under the controul of its teachers. The same tenets, however irregular, must characterise the whole fraternity ; otherwise that fraternity has to divide again, under the direction of the same Spirit which tore it asunder from the established church.

Thus, in one conventicle the assembly is taught, that the sacraments and ordinances of the Gospel may be safely dispensed with, or that they ought to be wholly rejected—in another, that salvation is to be obtained by faith alone, without works of righteousness—in a third, that the Scripture is not to

be received as a certain rule of faith, or even that Christ is to be regarded only in the light of a prophet, or of a moral instructor.—And wherever these tenets prevail, they must be acknowledged, throughout the society, as the sacred badge of brotherhood. This is not, therefore, *private* judgment, but the judgment of *faction*. It is a mere adoption of the notions of men, who assume an *arbitrary dominion* over the faith of their followers, and teach, not the Gospel of peace, but the vague suggestions of insubordinate minds. To become the founder of a single sect, upon such principles, the teacher must assume to himself powers far more extensive than those which were committed to the apostles of Christ. The work which he undertakes demands an exercise of authority which those apostles neither claimed to themselves, nor conceded to the churches. They never asserted an authority to mix their own judgment and speculation in the *doctrine* which they taught: they acted under a limited commission. The terms of this commission they deemed it their sacred duty faithfully to execute, and strictly to enforce,

And being fully persuaded that their commission came from God, the supreme Lord of all, they not only made it the great rule of their own ministerial conduct, but also, in the most authoritative language, impressed upon their converts the absolute necessity of complying with its terms in their fullest extent.

Thus, for example, St. Paul addresses the churches of Galatia:—*I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another Gospel, which is not another—for, in reality, the doctrines of men, the suggestions of human judgment, are no Gospel at all:—but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ: But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.* Such is the apostolical sentence. And, lest the church should deem this strong language, as the sudden and unguarded effusion of zeal, it is again repeated deliberately—*As we said before, so say I now again, If any man teach any*

other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed ! (Gal. i. 8, 9.)

To those ears which have been softened down by the lenient spirit of our laws, and by that laxity of principle, and contempt of discipline, which have sprung from the abuse of those laws—to those who imagine that, because all religions are equally tolerated, one must be as good as another ; and that it does not signify what faith a man professes, provided he conduct himself regularly in civil society, and serve God according to the free dictates of his own conscience, or the choice of his judgment—to these men, the passage which I have now recited must carry a harsh and dictatorial sound.

But such passages demand attention. They are addressed to us individually ; for they are the words of that law by which we must all be judged in the last day. I therefore justify my own conduct, in recalling them to your notice, by the language of the same apostle :—*Do I now persuade men, or God ? or do I seek to please men ? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be*

the servant of Christ. (Gal. i. 10.) It is, then, my duty to remark, that the anathema which is here pronounced upon any man, or even an angel from heaven, who should preach another Gospel, or deviate from the common faith, brings into narrow limits that freedom of opinion which is often claimed in our land as the right of private judgment.

Private judgment, according to the apostle's absolute decision, has no right to touch the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. These doctrines are derived from heaven, and must be received as they are given, without the alloy of philosophical speculation or human device. And the apostles, though they possessed not that arbitrary dominion over the faith of the church, which would have entitled them to teach an optional doctrine of their own, were yet invested with full authority to propagate the *one faith, once delivered to the saints*, and censure and restrain every deviation from its *purity and integrity*.

But it will be asked, *How is this categorical position to be reconciled to the lenity*

of the British laws? It is not necessary to the *truth* or *obligation* of the Gospel, that it should be reconciled at all. Human laws may err, and they have often erred; but the Gospel is the word of God. In this instance, however, the equity of our laws may be vindicated and illustrated by a familiar similitude, which will also shew their consistency with the Spirit of our religion.

Under our present government, we are as mariners in a free port. Every man is at liberty to depart when he pleases, and to shape his course as he thinks most convenient. At the same time it is permitted to those officers who are stationed in this port for the preservation of good order, and it is their duty, to caution the unadvised not to put to sea in a storm, not to embark in a rotten vessel, or steer to a coast where *the pestilence walketh in darkness*.

This is not persecution. It is no restraint on civil liberty: it is only salutary admonition. The wanderer is invited, he is intreated to remain in a place of safety: he is warned of the danger which may attend his

rash departure. This is a friendly office. The advice is good; but it is not enforced by compulsion. It is sanctioned only by the consequential risk and hazard which await *him* who shall refuse to hear, or treat with neglect, the things that make for his peace.

SERMON IV.

OF THE MINISTERIAL COMMISSION IN THE
CHURCH OF CHRIST.

I COR. IV. 1.

Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

FROM these words, in which St. Paul describes his own ministerial office, and that of his brethren the apostles, I shall take occasion to enquire into the constitution of that ministry to which Christ committed the care of his church. And, first of all, I shall consider the credentials of the apostolical appointment.

When our Lord had, by his meritorious passion and death, accomplished the great work of man's redemption, and was now about to leave the world, and go to the Father, he committed the visible superintendence of his church to his apostles, in the following memorable words :—

All power is given to me in heaven and in

earth. Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost : teaching them to observe all things ; whatsoever I have commanded you. He adds—And lo ! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. (Matt. xxviii. 18—20.)

Here we learn, that the power or authority which is to be exercised in the government of the church, originally belongs to God, the Father of all : this power is given to the Son ; and, by the Son, committed to his apostles. But where does it proceed afterwards ? To whom does our Lord promise the continuance of his presence, even to the end of the world ? It cannot be to the apostles exclusively ; for they finished their course in a few years, and were removed by death from their important station. Nor can we understand this promise, as extending to every one who should take upon himself the office of a teacher ; for we are told by these very apostles, and by Christ himself, *that many should come, in his name, and should deceive many.* He did not promise the

continuance of his presence with such de-
ceivers.

It was, then, to the apostles themselves, in the first instance, that this divine promise was given; and, after them, to those *disciples* whom they should have made, in all nations, and should have taught to *observe all things, whatsoever he had commanded them*. For, observing all things, that were given in charge to the apostles, must include an observance of the duties of the ministry, and must, therefore, necessarily suppose a deputation of that authority, by which the ministry was constituted and established. Hence, we must regard this promise as extending to that succession of ministers to whom the apostolical charge should be duly committed; and to that church which should faithfully remain under their care and superintendance, even to the end of the world. All these our Saviour regards as so intimately united with his apostles, that he addresses them as if they had been all present:—*Lo ! I am with you alway*:—with *you*, as an integral body.

In another record of the apostolical com-

mission, we are told—*Jesus said to his apostles again, Peace be unto you ! As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, saying, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.* (John, xx. 21—23.)

This power of absolution and authoritative censure is expressly committed to the apostles, as governors of the church, for the maintenance of good order, and the enforcement of just discipline. And as the obligation of maintaining the decency of conduct and good order could never cease, whilst an apostolical church should remain upon earth, it must be admitted, that this power has also remained with the duly constituted ministers of Christ throughout all succeeding ages. Accordingly, we find that, in the days of the apostles, and in the times immediately subsequent to them, it was a branch of ministerial discipline, to pronounce an authoritative censure on the disorderly and irregular, who could not, after this, be received into full communion, by

any local congregation of the church, till they should have manifested signs of true repentance; and have obtained the sentence of reconciliation, from the same constituted authority.

Upon the powers with which the apostles were duly invested, they acted regularly, and orderly, for the propagation of the Gospel, and the edification of the *one and undivided body of Christ's visible church*, in which they were, at first, the sole ministers. But, as the work of the ministry increased with the extent of that church, they began to exercise that authority which our Lord had deputed to them, in ordaining ministers of distinct orders, each order for the discharge of its respective and appropriate office. And, that no man might have an opportunity of intruding into the ministry, without lawful authority; that the church might not be exposed to danger, or deceived by false and self-constituted teachers; this ordination was conducted with visible form, and ostensible ceremony; one part of which was the solemn and public imposition of hands, by those who had

derived their own appointment, and the power of appointing others, from Christ himself.

Thus it is recorded, that, in those days when the members of the church first became numerous, *The twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men, of honest report, and full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.*

Let us observe the scope of this apostolical direction. It is not said "*whom YE, the members of the church, may appoint,*" or "*who may appoint themselves by virtue of a special call;*" but, "*whom WE, the deputed shepherds of Christ's flock, may appoint.*" These candidates are required to be men of honest report, and endowed with the Holy Ghost, and with wisdom. Their qualifications were far from being mean; but these qualifications did not entitle them to take upon themselves the office of *deacons*, the lowest order of the ministry which is mentioned in the New Testament: nor did

they authorise the church to invest them with that office. For this, they must have the official appointment, or ordination, of those who had been duly constituted *stewards of the mysteries of God*. Wherefore we are further told, *The church set these men before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid their hands upon them.* (Acts, vi. 2, 3, 6.)

So again it is recorded, that *The Holy Ghost said to those prophets and teachers, who were in the church at Antioch, Separate me Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.* (Acts, xiii. 3, &c.)

These apostles had been already in the ministerial office: but they are now invested with higher powers, and with authority to appoint other ministers. Accordingly we learn that, in their subsequent travels; they ordained them *elders*, or *priests*; in every church, or local congregation; and, *with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, on whom they believed.* (Acts, xiv. 23.) And here we

must remember, that the ordaining of ministers always supposes the imposition of hands, by those who were duly authorised to make such appointment; for, without this form, no man was regarded as qualified for the discharge of the sacred office. Wherefore St. Paul instructs Timothy—*Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy—public declaration—with the laying on the hands of the presbytery.* (1 Tim. iv. 14.)

The *presbytery*, or *eldership*, which is here mentioned, takes in all the higher orders of the ministry, and includes the apostles themselves. Hence St. Peter and St. John acknowledge the title of *presbyters* or *elders*. And, in this comprehensive sense the term must be understood, in the passage before us. For St. Paul says again—*Wherefore I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee, by the putting on of MY HANDS.* (2 Tim. i. 6.)

Here the *gift of God* means, the appointment and authority of a Christian minister. The graces of faith and piety had been manifest in Timothy long before. From a

child, he had known the Holy Scripture; yet this *gift* was not in him, previous to the putting on of the apostle's hands; and it was conferred upon him *by virtue of that act*. It is called the *gift of God*, because it is derived, in regular and constituted order, from our Lord Jesus Christ, and from God the Father: and this, by express and official appointment.

Thus the establishment of an authorised ministry, in the Christian church, is proved by the records of the New Testament.

The Father conferred his power upon the Son; the Son committed it to the apostles; the apostles ordained others, who had the endowment of the same *gift of God*, to provide a due succession in the work of the ministry. And, for the due discharge of the sacred office, a regular gradation of ministers was provided.

We have already seen the appointment of *deacons* and *elders*, or *priests*. But, as the writers of the New Testament do not expressly mention the order of *bishops*, as presiding in the church of every district, some have taken occasion to argue, that, in the age of the apostles, no such order, as

distinct from the priests, did exist: and hence they have framed an objection to the episcopal government of the church.

But, even admitting the candour and good faith of such an objection, we must still maintain, that it is founded in misapprehension.

In the constitution of the church of Christ, every thing was brought forward in regular order, and in its due season. Whilst our Lord himself continued in his public ministry, as the *visible* head and superintendant of his church, he was the great, and only, *bishop* of their souls. He did not invest his apostles with their episcopal office, or commit to them the charge of the flock, till he was about to leave the world, and go to the Father. They were not his *partners* in authority, but his *successors* in the visible government of his household.

So, whilst the apostles continued in the execution of their charge, they were, in reality, the *bishops*, or superintendants of the visible church of Christ. Thus we find that, immediately after our Lord's ascension, the apostolical office is expressly termed a *bishopric* or *episcopacy*; and this is the

rank from which *Judas, by transgression, fell.* (Acts, i. 20.)

Hence we are told, that the apostles went about, *confirming the churches*; and St. Paul speaks of that which came upon him daily, *the care, or superintendance of all the churches.* And how they discharged their *episcopal* duty, we may fully perceive, by that record which is termed their *Acts*, as well as by the pastoral epistles, which they addressed to the several local branches, or to the general body of the church; in which they inculcate the purity of the faith, maintain good order, and enforce discipline, with all the authority and dignity which pertain to the sacred office of a bishop. During the active period of their own ministry, then, it would have been an offence against the constituted laws of order, to appoint others to that charge, with which they themselves had been duly invested. It would have implied a dereliction of that trust, which the Lord himself had reposed in them. But when they had approached the end of their course—when they were about to be removed from their ministry, and to receive the fruit of their labours—

we find that these faithful *stewards of the mysteries of God* proceeded to the appointment of bishops, as their authorised successors, in the government and superintendence of the church.

Of such appointment, two illustrious examples are found in the New Testament; namely, *Timothy*, bishop of the Ephesians, and *Titus*, bishop of the Cretians. Both these were not only appointed, but also *stationed*, in their respective districts, by St. Paul, who, in his epistles to these his beloved converts, declares the authority and explains the duties of the episcopal office, with solemnity and precision. Particularly, he marks, as the prerogative of that office, the power of ordaining a succession of lawful and duly qualified ministers, for the service of the church.

Thus Timothy is exhorted, *to lay hands suddenly on no man*. (1 Tim. v. 22.) The ordination of ministers was, then, *his* prerogative: otherwise, what could such a caution have availed, if men had the power of intruding into the ministry, without imposition of hands by their lawful bishop?

Again, this charge is given to the same

apostolical prelate—*Thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus—And the things that thou hast heard of me, among many witnesses—the instructions delivered at the time of thy public ordination—THE SAME COMMIT THOU TO FAITHFUL MEN, who shall be able to teach others also.* (2 Tim. ii. 2.)

Here we learn, that the ministers of the Christian church are to teach those things only which are committed to them; and that they are not to intrude into the sacred office, or to be acknowledged as public teachers, till they are publicly, and officially, intrusted with the work of the ministry.

The same apostle says to Titus—*For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders IN EVERY CITY, as I had appointed thee.* (Tit. i. 5.)

Why is this general commission given to Titus, if the members of the church at large had authority to constitute a ministerial order of their own; or, if the elders of two or three local congregations, having received ordination themselves, had the

power of ordaining others? It was not so; for the *things that were wanting*, were to be set in order by the bishop; and by him also the elders, IN EVERY CITY, were to be ordained; and this, by virtue of his, own apostolical appointment, as superintendent of the church of Crete.

Thus we find that, in the constitution of the church of Christ, every thing was conducted in that manner in which decency, and just subordination, required that it should be conducted; and that the three orders of the ministry were successively appointed, as they became necessary, for general edification and good government. When the church at Jerusalem became numerous, *deacons* were appointed to assist the apostles in the daily ministration. When converts were made, and churches formed, in other cities, then *elders*, or *local pastors*, were ordained in each of those cities, the apostles still retaining the *general episcopacy*, or superintendence, of all the churches. And finally, when the apostles themselves were about to resign their sacred charge, they ordained *bishops*, to whom they committed the government of the church, and, by a solemn deputation

of the authority which Christ had put into their hands, invested them with power to constitute and appoint a due succession in the several branches of the ministry. But, in the apostolical church, no man could be received as a minister, unless his appointment were officially and visibly derived, in an uninterrupted course, from the fountain of all authority, even from God himself.

Hence, St. Paul, speaking of the priesthood, has declared—*No man taketh this honour to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be a high priest, but HE that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to-day have I begotten thee; as he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec.* (Heb. v. 4—6.)

Such is the scriptural account of the official and authoritative appointment of the stewards and ministers of the church of Christ. But as this appointment has been disregarded, by various descriptions of men who profess his holy religion, it may be proper, in this place, to consider some of those pretences upon which this constitution of the Gospel has been set aside.

The principal arguments by which this irregular practice has been supported, may be reduced to the two following heads.—

1. Some have urged, that the apostles appointed their successors, under the immediate and visible direction of the Holy Spirit; and hence they infer, that, as miracles have now ceased, as this visible direction is no longer given, Christians may lawfully depart from this primitive rule, and, by the guidance of human judgment, may safely constitute ministers, who do not derive their office in an uninterrupted succession from the apostles.

And, 2dly, as error is various and inconsistent, there are others who boldly assert, that the miraculous inspiration of the Holy Ghost has never ceased; that certain Christians have *a special and perceptible call of the Spirit* to the work of the ministry; and that such ministers must, therefore, be considered as exercising the sacred office *by divine appointment*, though they want the formality of human ordination.

With regard to the former of these arguments, it may fairly be submitted to the consideration of every serious person, whether

the same mode of reasoning would not apply, with equal propriety and force, to the profession of the Christian faith, to the use of prayer, and to every ordinance of the Gospel. If one man is justified in pleading—*“The apostles officially appointed a succession of ministers, by the immediate direction of the Holy Ghost ; but as miracles have now ceased, the preservation of that succession must be matter of indifference :”* if one man is authorised in saying this, why may not another be allowed to plead, that, *“In the days of the apostles, faith and prayer were attended with a power of working miracles ; but as that power is now withholden, faith and prayer can no longer be indispensably required ?”* The argument clearly applies, in the latter case, as properly and as forcibly as it does in the former. It is therefore altogether inadmissible : for if it be admitted at all, there is no restraining of its operation, till it has unhinged every Christian duty.

And as this argument is inconsistent with an established profession of Christianity, so it appears to have been founded in a radical misapprehension. The appointment

which the apostle made was *official*. They judged of the *apparent* qualification of the candidate for the ministry; but we are not warranted to say, that, in this discharge of their office, they had such a particular direction of the Spirit as must have laid open to them the secrets of the probationer's heart, and ascertained his future conduct. On the contrary, it is evident that this was not always the case. The persons to be ordained were not, generally, selected by the apostles. The members of the church chose them out amongst themselves, judging by their apparent fitness, and set them before the apostles, with a testimonial, and recommendation. (Acts, vi.) Here it is evident, that apostolical ordination, though necessary to constitute a Christian minister, is nothing more than an *official act*.

Hence it is recorded that, as one of our Lord's chosen apostles fell by transgression, so also some of those very ministers whom the apostles officially appointed fell into apostacy and error. Such was the case with one of the first deacons, who became the founder of a pernicious schism. Had the apostles acted in this *official capacity*,

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under such a special direction as must have unveiled the heart of every minister whom they appointed, they could not have had occasion to complain of those false teachers, *who were unawares introduced amongst the brethren.* In this respect, they acted upon a general rule ; but a rule which was to be perpetual in the visible church. *They laid hands suddenly on no man.* They attended to the recommendation of the brethren, and judged of apparent fitness and qualification, but acknowledged that God alone can judge the heart.

But even supposing that the apostles had, in the discharge of this office, a spiritual direction, which is no longer manifest ; it must yet be remembered, that miracles were not designed to be perpetual. They were only to continue *till the church should be fully established.* Thus we are told that *Christ gave some, apostles ; and some, prophets ; and some, evangelists.* All these were supported by an extraordinary and perceptible influence of the divine Spirit : but how long were they to be given ? Not for a perpetuity, but for a limited time, and till a certain end should have been attained.

Till we the church—all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man; unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that is, till the church of Christ be fully constituted and established in its unity and integrity.

But was the church authorised, after these extraordinary helps should have ceased, to depart from the apostolical rule, and to appoint ministers, by some optional rule of its own? By no means. These aids were expressly given for the edifying of the body—or church—of Christ: *That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love—in the bond of charity—may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working, in the measure of every part, maketh increase*

of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love. (Eph. iv. 11—16.

In this *individual* church, the laws and appointments of our great Master continue in force till his second advent. And therefore, when he sets forth the state of the ministry in this church, or in the spiritual kingdom upon earth, he represents himself as delivering to his confidential servants their several talents, with the express charge—*Occupy till I come.* From the time of the Lord's departure till his return, these talents are not to be alienated by those who had received them. And though, during his absence, he does not visibly superintend the improvement or abuse they make of his treasure, yet, at his second coming, he reckons with those servants to whom the charge has been committed, and denounces the judgment of these *other subjects* who, in the mean time, had despised his government.

To these things the attention of every Christian is seriously called. Even amongst men, how could he be deemed a faithful servant who should contemn the commands of his master the moment he sup-

poses that his eye is not immediately upon him, and that his hand is not extended to direct that work which he has expressly enjoined and disposed in regular order? But we have a Master who sees, and will justly recompense every work of man. And though, for a season, he has withdrawn his visible presence, in order to prove our fidelity, and the sincerity of our obedience to his laws, it is most assuredly to be expected, that, when he returns, he will have regard to the observance or neglect of those laws; and will not pass a light censure upon those who, taking advantage of his absence, have usurped the office of superintending his household, and wrested his authority out of the hands in which he had placed it.

As to those teachers who assert a divine appointment to the ministerial office, by virtue of a special and perceptible call of the Spirit, they exhibit no other proof of such a call, than the power of preaching extemporaneously; and upon this slight credential it is, that they apply to themselves the words of our Lord to his apostles—*Take no thought beforehand, what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but*

whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye; for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost. (Mark, xiii. 11.)

Upon this subject I would observe that, although it be not the province of human judgment to meddle with the faith and precepts of the Gospel, yet it has its due place and office in matters of religion; and may be justly exercised upon such occasions as the present. And here an unbiassed judgment will clearly perceive, that any man of common abilities may acquire a habit of haranguing for an hour upon any general subject, without the smallest claim to inspiration. It is also to be observed, that many of these *favoured* teachers, not long ago, were accustomed to discourse upon political topics, with an eloquence equal to any which they display in their conventicles, and with a tendency which by no means indicated the direction of the Spirit of truth.

It is not reasonable, therefore, that any man should give implicit credit to him who pretends to a supernatural power, till the presence of that power be demonstrated by some certain sign, or till it may be enforced

by fair argument. And the ecstatic feelings which the ministry of these men excites in their audience, are no certain signs of the divine blessing upon their labours, or of the illumination of the Spirit: for effects still more extraordinary were produced by the fanaticism of heathen priests, inasmuch as they created an opinion of inspiration, both in themselves and in others.

The demonstration of the Spirit, in the days of the apostles, consisted in the gift of miracles and prophecy. This was sufficient: for, as God cannot deceive his creatures, no power can work a miracle in his name, but the power of God himself. But if this demonstration be now demanded, it will be replied, that it is no longer to be found in the visible church. The pretensions of these modern teachers must, therefore, be subjected to other proof. The Spirit of truth must be consistent with itself. It is not, then, to be supported in argument, that this Spirit should, in the days of our Lord and his apostles, and with the demonstration of miracles, have committed the work of the ministry to one order of men, *officially appointed*, and now, without any

demonstration at all, have placed it in the hands of others.

Again: the Spirit of God in the revelation of the Gospel, and at the time when that revelation was supported by the evidence of miracles, expressly enjoins the *union of the flock of Christ*, and forbids every degree of dissension and division. It cannot, then, be maintained that, in our days, and without any degree of evidence, the same Spirit should contradict itself, abrogate the laws of the Gospel, dissolve the union of the church, and authorise unlimited separation.

The Spirit of God in the Gospel enjoins the profession of *one immutable faith*, the admission of *one consistent form of doctrine*, and the observance of *one orderly system of discipline*. TRUTH IS STILL INVARIABLE. It is, therefore, impossible the Spirit of truth should at present teach a *diversity of faiths*, a *variety of doctrinal systems*, and an *immunity from the laws of good order*.

Where there are divers systems, with regard to things thus essential, there must be error and corruption in some of the teachers.

And does it not follow, that those who deviate from the truth, whilst they pretend to be under the immediate direction of the Spirit of God, are chargeable with the sin of *blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*?

And if there be but one system of evangelical truth, we must not seek to learn it from any of those who plead an appointment which they cannot produce, and, in the presumption of spiritual pride, set at nought the laws of Christ, and the constituted order of his church, Here it is our evident duty, to observe the general precept of our Lord—GO NOT AFTER THEM, NOR FOLLOW THEM.

The appointed ministers of Christ's church may occasionally err—they *have their treasure in earthen vessels*; but their errors are easily perceived and avoided by those who have the Gospel in their hands, and attend to its instructions with diligence and simplicity of heart. And therefore no Christian is authorised, upon these and the like pretences, to separate the body of Christ's church, to condemn the administration of his ordinances in the hands of his official servants, and to follow those who manifestly

and systematically transgress his laws—who not only *break the commandment*, but also *teach men so*.

Such conduct with regard to a civil government would not be deemed innocent. And no government upon earth has been established upon a more regular and definite plan, than the *one visible church* of Christ; no human order of magistrates more lawfully and solemnly commissioned, than the stewards and ministers of that visible church.

SERMON V.

OF THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH.

JOHN, XVII. 21.

That they all may be one : as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us : that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

WHEN we take a general view of the primitive church of Christ, as it grew up, under the care of his apostles, it must be distinctly perceived, that its first and most prominent character is that of UNITY.

However the individuals, or the several congregations of which that church consisted, may have been locally dispersed, they composed but one harmonious brotherhood united together, and consolidated by the use of the same sacred ordinances, the profession of one common faith, and the acknowledgment of one system of doctrine, which they received *not of man but of God*, and, therefore, deemed it unchangeable. And the indispensable obligation of maintaining

this unity, is taught and enforced by Christ himself.

Thus, when speaking of the gentile converts, who were to be added to the society of his disciples, he says—*And other sheep I have which are not of this fold*—which are not of the house of Jacob ;—*these also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice ; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.* (John, x. 16.) From which passage it evidently appears, that these sheep do not properly hear his voice, till they hear him calling them into the *one fold* of his visible church.

Accordingly, our blessed Lord, in the words of my text, earnestly prays to his Almighty Father, that his whole visible church upon earth, or *all who should believe in him, through the word of his apostles,* might be preserved in perfect peace and unity amongst themselves ; and he insists upon this unity, as a powerful argument to convince the world that he came from God. —*That they all may be one : as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us ; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*

In order that we may be duly impressed with the force and energy of these words, I shall consider the time and occasion upon which they were spoken ; and take a brief view of some important events with which they stand connected.

They were spoken by our Lord in that same night in which he was betrayed ; at a time when he was taking a solemn and affectionate leave of his apostles, before he submitted to die upon the cross for the redemption of our fallen race. In the evening of that day, he had retired with the twelve into a private room, to celebrate the feast of the passover—to commemorate the sacrifice of that Lamb which, by the effusion of his blood, had preserved the chosen people of God from the power of the destroying angel.

This consecrated rite was to the families of Israel, not only a monument of a great deliverance, but also a pledge of union and mutual harmony. They were all commanded to observe the same ordinance : and those friends and neighbours who assembled in this celebration, never separated from each other's society during the sacred

solemnity: for it was ordained—*In one house shall it be eaten: thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh thereof out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it!* (Exod. xii. 46, 47.) Wherefore our Lord says to his apostles—*With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer!* (Luke, xxii. 15.) And for this purpose he assembles his little flock at the same table with himself.

But because a more sacred lamb, even Christ our passover, was to be slain on the morrow; because the passover was to be fulfilled in the kingdom of God; our Lord, in order to impress upon their minds the true design of this great solemnity—this hallowed pledge of union in the congregation of Israel, immediately connects with it the Christian sacrament of his holy supper: for, *as they were eating the paschat lamb, Jesus took bread and blessed it and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat: this is my body—this is, henceforth, your passover.—And he took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it: for this is my blood of*

the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (Matt. xxvi. 26—28.) He also commands them—This do in remembrance of me. (Luke, xxii. 19.) Do what? Be all partakers of the same bread and of the same cup: use this sanctified rite of hospitality in commemoration of your mutual fellowship with your dying Saviour and with each other. This was surely a most sacred pledge of union amongst the disciples of our Lord. But how abundantly is the obligation of this union enforced by the impressive and pathetic charge with which it was accompanied, and which is recorded by the evangelist St. John!

The great lesson inculcated by this institution, is thus opened by our blessed Lord. He declares to his apostles, that he should be betrayed to death by one of the chosen few who had received bread from his hand. And when this ungrateful wretch had withdrawn for the perpetration of his meditated design, he says to his faithful associates—Little children, yet a little while I am with you! When their attention is fully awakened by this tender address, he proceeds—A new commandment I give unto you, that ye

love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John, xiii. 34, 35.) Thus we find that the first thing impressed upon the minds of the apostles, by this holy rite of hospitality at their Lord's table, is that unity, that mutual love and affection, which he points out as the peculiar mark of all his true disciples; as the characteristic by which they were to be distinguished in the sight of all mankind.

From this injunction of union in affection, our Lord proceeds to enforce the necessity of professing a sincere faith in the Son, as united with his heavenly Father.—*Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God; believe ye also in me.—I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me.—He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.—I am in the Father, and the Father in me.*

Whilst they preserve this union of love, and this purity of faith, he assures them that the prayers which they make in his name shall not fail of their due effect. *Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that*

will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. But, lest they should retain a presumptuous confidence in his favour, whilst they neglected his laws, he repeats the charge—If ye love me, keep my commandments. And again—He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

This obedience to his precepts, which Christ requires of his disciples as a proof of their love to him, and as a pledge of the divine love to be manifested in their own souls, has an especial reference to that new commandment of union and mutual affection, which is ratified by the solemnities of this present meeting—by the memorial of a dying Saviour.

Wherefore our Lord continues—Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. And this peace is to be evident to all mankind; for it is to operate to this end—That the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.

Our Lord had already taught his apostles

that the conviction of the world, in this particular, was to arise from an observance of their mutual love and union. And, to illustrate and enforce this important lesson, he goes on to represent his universal church under the figure of one individual vine. Of this vine he himself was the root or stem, and his disciples constituted the several branches. To their continuance in the unity of this sacred vine, or church of Christ, it is essentially required, not only that they profess the true faith of the Gospel, and bring forth the general fruits of righteousness; but also that they keep his commandments;—*If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.* And here, as if his whole law were summed up in the new commandment which he now gave them at the institution of his holy supper *this, and this alone*, is repeatedly impressed upon their hearts:—*This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I gave you commandment. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatever I command you.—I have chosen you,*

and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father, in my name, he may give it you. Whose thing I command you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. Thus the great duty of maintaining union and mutual love is indispensably enjoined to the members of Christ's church. Upon the observance of this command depends their proficiency in the ways of righteousness and the success of their prayers. Our Lord again assures his apostles, that, whilst they maintain this love and union, the prayer that they should make in his name would be accepted of his Father. It is also upon the sanction of this duty, that he confirms the great promise of sending the Holy Ghost to direct their judgment, to sanctify their hearts, and to abide with them for ever. And he closes this solemn address by declaring, that his design in speaking these words to his apostles was, that in him they might have peace, though they should have tribulation in the world.

Thus we see that the main intention of this admirable charge is, to urge the absolute

necessity of union and harmony amongst the members of Christ's church. What an impression must it have made upon the souls of his apostles, enforced as it was by the heart-rending circumstances of that awful night, when their kind and compassionate Lord was taking a tender leave of his assembled friends, and going to suffer a cruel and ignominious death; especially when they had before their eyes the elements of that holy ordinance, which commemorated his dying for their sake. Can any thing be conceived which would have more deeply impressed the duty of shewing their love to their divine Master, by keeping his new commandment, and cherishing a spirit of union and harmony amongst themselves? Yes—our attention is called to greater things than these. We must remember, that all this took place in the same night when our Lord, being in *an agony*, *prayed more earnestly*; and his sweat was *as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground*. (Luke, xxii. 44.) Having closed this charge to his apostles, he turns to his Almighty Father with the

most powerful intercession in their behalf, praying that he would keep them in unity and in truth:—*Holy Father, keep, through thine own name, those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are! I pray not that thou wouldest take them out of the world, but that thou wouldest keep them from the evil.*—Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. And now he adds a prayer for the whole body of his church upon earth:—*Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word—that is, for the Christians of all ages and nations who should believe through the preaching of his appointed ministers—that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may believe that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me.*

Such is the tenor of the communion office,

as it was administered by Christ himself, to the great law of union and harmony in his church, which is ratified by this holy ordinance—an ordinance in which all his disciples are commanded to continue till he come again to judgment; and we find it repeatedly urged, that this union and harmony of his church is intended as a powerful argument to convince the world of the certainty of our Lord's election from God the Father; and, therefore, of the truth of his religion. And such is the force of this argument, that this ordinance has a direct application to the whole of his *visible* church here upon earth, for in no other acceptation of the words can this argument apply to the world in general; such being the union of love and mutual affection, which is essentially required in the church of Christ—in that church, for which our Lord intercedes with his heavenly Father, and to which, alone, he promises the communication of his glory. It may be asked, Where is this divine principle now to be recognised amongst the professors of his religion? Do the members of the various assemblies of our days maintain

that perfect union, which is the essential mark of true Christianity? If they do not, where is the ground of their confidence towards God, or what lesson do their strife and divisions offer to the world?

To the solemn charge of the dying Redeemer—to his earnest prayer for the preservation of his universal church in perfect unity and peace—all the apostles of Christ attended with reverence and deep humility, and with a feeling of that love which was enjoined by their blessed Lord—all, excepting one, who, though a professed of ostentatious zeal, had now withdrawn from their society upon a separate scheme of his own: but woe to that man who shall follow his example! All, excepting that one, revered and observed the new commandment of their Master, and continued in perfect unity.

At the time when this injunction was given, they had all been partakers of the same bread and of the same cup; and at this commemoration of Christ is the most sacred solemnity amongst his disciples, the church has given it the name of communion, or mutual fellowship, and has always es-

deemed its joint celebration as the highest
 pledge—as the hallowed test of obedience
 to the commandment of the Son of God;
 and of the maintenance of that union which
 must characterise the true members of his
 church. Hence, St. Paul says—*The cup
 of blessing which we bless, is it not the com-
 munion of the blood of Christ? The bread
 which we break, is it not the communion of
 the body of Christ? For we, being many,
 are one bread and one body: for we are
 all partakers of that one bread.*
 (1 Cor. x. 16, 17.) Thus we see that our Lord taught and
 enforced the necessity of maintaining the
 unity of his church; and that a devout
 participation in this most sacred ordinance,
 and therefore, in every act of public worship,
 is required, as a necessary proof of our love
 to him, and of our obedience to his com-
 mandments. Let us, therefore, my brethren, be per-
 fectly united in one heart, and in one mind,
 that the world may believe that Christ was
 sent from God the Father, and that we
 are his true disciples.

SERMON VI.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

JOHN, XVII. 21.

That they all may be one : as thou, Father, and art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us : that the world may know that thou hast sent me.

THE great duty of preserving the unity of the church, in obedience to the command of our divine Master, was, in the apostolical age, emphatically asserted, and zealously maintained; inasmuch as this church is represented as one individual body, of which Christ is the head. Thus the apostle tells us, that the Father gave Christ to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. (Eph. i. 22, 23.) Nor is this body to be regarded as an undistinguished mass, without internal order and harmony of parts: for the same apostle exhorts his converts, that they, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head,

even Christ : from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. (Eph. iv. 15, 16.) And, in another place, he speaks of holding the head, from which all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. (Col. ii. 19.)

Thus it appears, that the church of Christ is a well-organized body, in which every member has its due place and office, and the several parts have a mutual subserviency and co-operation to the good of the whole. Wherefore St. Paul exhorts, That there be no schism, or breach, in the body; but that all the members should have the same care one for another. (1 Cor. xii. 25.) He does not speak of the local congregations of the church, as distinct bodies; for, we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. (Rom. xii. 5.) In another place, he says, Glad is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Pet.

And so dearly, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same things; and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together, in the same mind, and in the same judgment. (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.)

St. John also declares—*If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another; and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (1 John, i. 7.)* Thus we learn that, in compliance with our Lord's new commandment, the apostles inculcated the essential lesson of unity in mind, in judgment, and in affections, amongst the true professors of Christianity. And we shall presently see, that one principal end, for which a regular and duly authorised ministry had its appointment, was the maintenance of this union, which was consolidated, not only by the use of the same sacred ordinances, but also by the profession of one common faith, and the acknowledgment of one uniform system of doctrine. Many, indeed, have urged the *plan of Christian liberty*, for the disturbing of the constituted order of the church in these particulars. But it is clear, that this

great principle of liberty, as unfolded by the apostles, does not extend to the setting aside of the authorised ministry, or the dissolving of the integrity of Christ's body: so neither does it furnish the slightest pretence for any innovation in its faith, or the doctrine of its teachers; the purity and identity of the faith being essential to the very being of the church. Our Lord prayed to the Father, that all those who should believe in him through the word of his apostles, might be preserved in perfect unity. Accordingly, we are told that the three thousand who were converted at one time by the preaching of St. Peter—those first fruits of the church ~~continued steadfast in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking bread, and in prayer.~~ (Acts, ii. 42.) in brotherly union. These converts not only received the doctrine of the apostles as they had been taught, but continued perfectly united with them, and with each other, in the congregation of the faithful, in the use of the sacred ordinances, and in the form of worship. They did not satisfy themselves with a general belief in the truth of the Gospel, and then withdraw into little separate assemblies to

comment and debate upon that truth, and to shape our doctrines and opinions for themselves; each after the dictates of his own judgment, or the conceptions of his own fancy; all which they might have done without the dread of civil restriction. For at that time the uniformity of Christian faith and worship was not enforced by penal laws. But such an extent of liberty was not warranted by the Gospel; and had these men enforced the claim as it is urged in our days, they would not have been acknowledged as true converts. The apostles admitted of no such latitude. On the contrary, we hear St. Paul, the prisoner of the Lord, beseeching the Ephesians, *that they walk worthy of their vocation, wherewith they are called, with all lowliness and meekness, and long suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace.*—For, as the apostle proceeds, *there is one body—one visible church—and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism.* (Eph. iv. 1-6.)
 Wherefore, as it follows—*Christ gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some,*

evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers,
 —For what purpose were they given? was
 it for the founding of various sects and deno-
 minations? No! They were given for the
 perfecting of the saints; for the work of the
 ministry; for the edifying of the body of
 Christ: till ye all come, IN THE UNITY OF
 THE FAITH, and of the knowledge of the
 Son of God, UNTO A PERFECT MAN—unto
 one, undivided church—unto the measure
 of the stature of the fulness of Christ.
 Was the church, after this, to separate
 into different parties and denominations?
 By no means. The divine purpose, in
 giving this organised ministry, as expressly
 stated, is to be—That we, henceforth, be no
 more children, tossed to and fro, and carried
 about with every wind of doctrine, by the
 sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, where-
 by they lie in wait to deceive. This latter
 clause has a reference to certain teachers,
 who are not acknowledged as apostolical;
 whose great principle is not unity, but sepa-
 ration; who, instead of holding fast the one
 faith, teach a variety of doctrines, shifting
 about as the inconstant winds, and, instead
 of edifying the saints in simplicity and god-

ly sincerity, ~~with~~ cunning craftiness, ~~he is~~
~~wait to deceive.~~ The words are St. Paul's.
 They are descriptive, but I need not apply
 them.

This whole passage sets before us, in the
 apostolical church, a due order, and just con-
 dition of the ministry: some of them, indeed,
 extraordinary, and only stationed for a time,
 till a certain end should have been obtain-
 ed, such as *apostles, prophets, and evange-*
lists; and others, permanent, and conti-
 nual, such as *pastors and teachers*; but all
 of them *given by Christ*, or invested with
 their several offices according to his de-
 clared and express appointment; and all
 directing their labours to the attainment of
 one great end—the *edifying of the church,*
into one perfect and undivided body, united
in the acknowledgement of one immutable
faith: and all appointed, likewise, for the
 express purpose of guarding this church,
 against those *various winds of doctrine*—
 those *seeds of error and division*, which con-
 ceited and unauthorized teachers were al-
 ready furnished with, and waiting an oppor-
 tunity to scatter amongst the brethren.

And the frustration of these receivers was

a charge of no trifling moment: for the unity and purity of the faith—the ground-work of all true Christianity—are matters of such weight, that their absolute necessity is inculcated throughout the apostolical writings. Thus St. Paul charges the Philippians, that they stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel. (Phil. i. 27.)

And St. Jude declares—*It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.* v. 3.—ONCE DELIVERED! for the faith is one, and it is delivered from heaven. It is no human speculation, to be remodelled by the private judgment of individuals, and accommodated to the progress of science, the state of society, or disposition of the times.

And, that there might be no room for doubt or hesitation as to the nature of that faith, which was uniformly and indispensably required in the members of Christ's church, our Lord himself declares its great and leading articles, when, just before his ascension, he commands his apostles to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing

them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. The faith, therefore, in which all these disciples were to be baptized, included a belief in the three persons of the ever-blessed Trinity. And the profession of this faith was required, previous to baptism, of every adult convert to the apostolical church, whether from Judaism or Heathenism. And when, during the period of infancy, the children of Christians were received by baptism into the congregation, the profession of the same faith was demanded, in their name, of those who made themselves responsible for their religious education.

Our Lord also taught his apostles, that *himself and the Father are one, inasmuch that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. (John, v. 23.)* We learn, moreover, that the *Holy Ghost is the spirit of the Father, and the spirit of Christ;* and, therefore, that *the three persons of the Godhead are essentially one.*

This is the faith which was received in the *one body* of the apostolical church; and the church maintained it, because it was revealed in the word of God, and because

the true members of Christ acknowledge that God is wiser than man.

In vain, then, have the adversaries of the church raised disputes and cavils as to the time when this faith was introduced into the world; in vain have they brought its principles to the test of their infidel philosophy. All true believers are established upon a rock. They are satisfied with the assurance that it is *the faith of the Gospel*; that the Son of God delivered it with his own mouth; that it was confirmed by the Holy Ghost speaking in his apostles; and that the same faith had begun to unfold itself in the very first page of the sacred volume, where we are taught, *that God, the supreme Father, sent forth his Word to call the universe into existence; that the Word went forth at his command, saying, LET THERE BE LIGHT! AND THERE WAS LIGHT; and that the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, producing order out of confusion.* But it must be further observed, that the faith, which united the apostolical church, did not consist in the mere acknowledgment of names and titles, leaving their respective import to be fixed and explained

by the various judgments or speculations of men.

The conceptions of the church, relative to the persons of the Godhead, must be regulated by the revealed word of God. It is a Christian duty to receive and admit that identical account of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which the Spirit of Truth has declared in that word—*to believe in God, upon his own authority. As no man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him, (Matt. xi. 27.)* it is an essential duty to receive, without contradiction or debate, that revelation which the Son of God hath given of his Almighty Father. And in this revelation we are taught, that he not only made the world, and all things therein, and that he continually sustains them in existence, *by the word of his power*; but, also, that *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John, iii. 16.)*

So also, on the other hand, as *no man knoweth the Son, but the Father, the ONE FAITH* of the church enjoins the belief of

that revelation, which the Spirit of the Father hath made, of the Son, throughout the holy Scriptures:—*that he came down from heaven, and was made man—that, for our salvation, he suffered affliction and death—that he rose again for our justification, and ascended to the Father—and that he shall come, in the last day, to judge the quick and the dead.*

And, as the Holy Ghost is *the Spirit of Truth*, which guided the apostles into *all truth*, the faith of the church does not rest in a bare acknowledgment of his name and existence; but includes a belief of all things which he spoke, by the mouth of the apostles and prophets; and relies, with unshaken assurance, upon that sanctifying influence which he has promised to the souls of the faithful.

So that, upon the whole, the faith which unites the church of Christ—that faith which it professes, in the *Father*, the *Son*, and the *Holy Ghost*—embraces those great truths by which we are assured, that the three persons of the blessed Trinity concurred in the plan of human salvation, and the sanctification of true believers. It extends from the very

foundation to the highest pinnacle of our hopes, and lays hold of the immortal reward of Christian obedience.

The substance of this faith, the church from the earliest times set forth in its *creeds*, or compendious forms of profession. These were neither distinct revelations in themselves, nor were they systems of mere human device. They were summaries of the leading and essential articles of that one faith, which was received by all true believers, collected from the doctrine of our Lord and his apostles.

For this doctrine, as it still remains upon record in the writings of the New Testament, is the sacred and complete canon of Christian faith, and is not to be moved by the various opinions and doctrines of men. Wherefore St. Paul thanks God, that the Romans, *who had been the servants of sin, have now obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine whereunto they were delivered* (Rom. vi. 17.)

They were, now, as much in subjection to the faith of the Gospel, to the form of apostolical doctrine, as they had been, during their unconverted state, in subjection to sin.

The church had no deliberative power over this doctrine; no right to add, to diminish, or distort. It was its duty to believe and obey. For the faith of the Gospel is a light from Heaven: it must be received in its native splendour; not scattered, disjointed, and discoloured, as men receive the rays of the sun through a prism.

And therefore no teachers of schism and heresy, no perverters of the faith, could be comprehended, or tolerated, in the apostolical church. *Now I beseech you, brethren, says St. Paul, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have received, and avoid them.* (Rom. xvi. 17.)

In like manner, he had beaught Timothy to abide at Ephesus, *that he might charge some to teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edifying, which is in faith.* (1 Tim. i. 3, 4.)

If the apostle gave this charge to Timothy, we must infer, that he had not left him upon a level in the church with those *false teachers* whom he thus reproves; but, in-
 vest-

ed with spiritual authority, to catechise and enforce his commission. In the same chapter, he also declares, *that the law—that law which demanded the obedience of the church—was made for every thing that is contrary to sound doctrine—to the doctrine of the Gospel—which was committed to his trust.* But how was it committed? This also the apostle explains. It was not because he felt an impulse in his own mind to become a minister, and acted spontaneously upon that impulse; but because Jesus Christ had put him into the ministry. In another place, he charges Timothy—*Take heed to thyself, and to the doctrine. Continue in these things: for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.* (1 Tim. iv. 16.) And again, he gives him this instruction—*If any man teach otherwise, and consent (not to) wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but boasting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmising, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth;*

supposing that gain is godliness:—From such withdraw thyself: (1 Tim. vi. 3—5.)

Titus also receives instruction, that it is required, in a bishop, to hold fast the faithful word, as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convince the gainsayers: for, as the apostle adds, there are many unruly and vain talkers, and deceivers. (Tit. i. 9, 10.)

St. John declaims—Whoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ—that one faith, once delivered to the saints—is not of God. (2 John, 9.)

Such is the language of our Lord's chosen missionaries, as recorded in the New Testament. Its meaning cannot be misunderstood. It is plain, express, and energetic. It enforces the necessity of one uncorrupted faith and doctrine, to be taught in one undivided church, by one duly constituted ministry, according to the appointment of Christ himself.

Shall it be urged, in opposition, that there are other texts of a different tendency? Surely such a plea cannot be admitted. Is not the Gospel consistent with itself? Is not the rule of our faith a straight rule? Or,

are there any amongst us who durst depart from this rule, and maintain, that the order and precision laid down in this sacred volume are not applicable to the present times—not consistent with the extent of civil liberty, with the advancement of science, or with the state of society as we now find it?

Let us beware how we trifle with holy things. The laws of Christ remain uncanceled: they are the same at this moment as they were at the time of their first promulgation; and they must continue to be binding upon all Christians, of all times and places, and under all circumstances. Their awful sanctions will not be removed before the great day in which we must all appear, and carry in our final account: for St. Paul affirms—*God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel.* (Rom. ii. 16.)

Can we, as Christians, assert, that, with regard to us—in favour of our times—the dispensation has been changed? No such assertion can be supported. Where, then, is that indulgence conceded to tender consciences—that freedom of opinion—that

right of private judgment—which, as some have maintained, extend their operation over the fundamental articles of faith and doctrine, over the declared regulations of the Gospel, and authorise the disuniting of the church of Christ? They are not to be found in the book which will be opened in *that day when we shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven.*

Let us, therefore, look to ourselves. We may, at present, abuse the lenient forbearance of our national laws. We may heedlessly mistake *temporal impunity* for *sacred authority*, and listen to the doctrines of erring and presumptuous men. But we shall not be admitted before our Judge with the Act of Toleration, the visions of enthusiasts, or the comments of philosophy, in our hands. The holy Scriptures claim a prerogative above all these, because they are not of man, but of God.

But some will reply—*We are to be judged, not according to our opinions and professions, but according to our deeds.* Admitting this to be true—Is not the wilful neglect of the written oracles of God, and walking by the directions of fallible men,

or the surmises of our own hearts, as much a deed of ours as any thing we can commit? And who will dare to affirm, that, for such a deed, he shall not be called to an account? No sincere disciple of Christ, who has been taught *to observe all things whatsoever he commanded his apostles*, can make this assertion.

Let us, then, turn away from every thing that will be consumed in the day of judgment, and attend to the infallible word of God, which teaches us to acknowledge the ~~unity~~ of the visible church of Christ, committed to the charge of one united ministry, appointed by the great Shepherd of the flock; and the unity of an incorrupt and immutable faith and doctrine, as necessary to secure to us the promises of the Gospel.

And in this holy unity may God preserve us, that we may have fellowship, not only with each other, but also with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Holy Ghost, in the unity of the Godhead, be ascribed all honour and glory, now and for ever.—Amen.

SERMON VII.

OF THE UNITY OF OBEDIENCE TO THE
LAWS OF CHRIST.

MATT. XXVIII, 20.

*Teaching them to observe all things what-
soever I have commanded you.*

IN order that the world might believe that God the Father sent his Son from heaven to redeem our fallen race, and might obtain a true knowledge of the blessings which he purchased for us, our divine Master formed his church into one harmonious body, compacted together by the use of the same sacred ordinances, and the profession of one common faith. But to the establishment of his religion—the unfolding of the ample design of his sacred mission—something more than this was to be required of his disciples. For, if what the Scripture declares be true—that *faith, without works, is dead, being alone*; that *the grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that, denying all*

ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; and, that our Saviour, Jesus Christ, gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, ZEALOUS of good works; (Tit. ii.)—if such be the inefficacy of a barren faith, such the great purpose of Christianity, and such the character of real Christians; it must be deemed essential to the very being of the church of Christ, that the faith of its members should manifest itself in an uniform course of obedience to his laws.

And the necessity of such obedience, our Lord himself, in his general charge to the apostles, expressly connects with the profession of the true faith. *Go ye, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;*—this clause is declarative of that one faith, which the apostles were to deliver to their converts; but the next enjoins obedience—*teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*

The obedience which Christ demands of

these disciples is in conformity with his own example, in fulfilling the will of his heavenly Father. And this sacred lesson is inculcated throughout the whole period of his public ministry. When he first entered upon the work of his mission, by submitting to the baptism of John, he declares—*Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.* (Matt. iii. 15.) And from henceforth we find him regular and constant in attending the established form of worship in the synagogue, and in the temple, exhorting his followers *to observe and do whatsoever was commanded by those who sat in Moses' seat*, or upon whom the ministerial office lawfully devolved; and enforcing that great truth, that *he came not to destroy, but to fulfil the law.* And, as the disciple is not greater than his master, he gives this general charge to all who receive his doctrine—*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me—follow my example—for I am meek and lowly in heart—I have, in all things, submitted to the will and appointment of my Father; submit ye, therefore, to me—to me who lay down my life for your sake!* And this submission is required as a testimony of our love and gra-

titude to our divine Benefactor. If we are his true disciples, surely we cannot refuse it. *If a man love me, he will keep my words—* and his obedience shall not go unrewarded ; for, *my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him.* (John, xiv. 23.) And again : *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love ; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.* (John, xv. 10.)

Obedience is, therefore, required, not only as a testimony of love and gratitude to our blessed Lord, but also as the very condition upon which we obtain the love of God, and secure to ourselves the great promises of the Gospel. Wherefore our Saviour exposes the folly and delusion of those who pretend to be his disciples, without a sincere and predominant purpose of obeying his laws. *Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say ?* And then he proceeds, by a forcible similitude, to illustrate the difference between a true and false professor :—*Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them—* whosoever professeth to be my disciple, and

hath faith productive of obedience—I will shew you to whom he is like—He is like a man who built on house, and digged deep—reflected deeply on the nature and efficacy of true faith—and laid the foundation upon a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it; for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth and doeth not, is like a man that, without a foundation, built an house upon the earth—upon a mere superficial and unstable faith—against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great. (Luke, vi. 46, &c.)

Here we perceive that an attention to Christian obedience is compared to the act of that man who digs to the rock of true evangelical faith, and lays a solid foundation upon it. And the necessity of such an operation is admitted, in general, by most professors of Christianity. Many of them, however, take a very imperfect view of this primary and most comprehensive duty: they think that nothing more is required by it, than an habitual regard to the great pro-

cepts of morality, contained in the Gospel; that even here, great allowance is to be made to particular situations in life, and the general frailty of human nature; and that they may safely dispense with the use of positive ordinances, as things which, in their estimation, are of far less importance. But where is the authority for such a dispensation? The Gospel has granted no such liberty: for our Saviour expressly declares—*Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so—shall not only allow himself to transgress, but also maintain the lawfulness of dispensing with universal obedience—that man shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven—shall not be acknowledged as a true member of my church;—but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.* (Matt. v. 19.)

It is, from hence, fully evident that our Lord gives no authority or countenance to that doctrine which systematically dispenses with obedience, even in the smallest matters. And, as his apostles taught the Gospel as they had received it, we hear St. Paul declaring to the church, that the

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enforcement of obedience upon the genuine principle of evangelical faith, was one great end of the apostolical mission:—*By whom, says he, we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations for his name. (Rom. i. 5.)*

And again, still addressing the church at Rome, he says—*God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin; but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine whereunto ye were delivered. (Rom. vi. 17.)* Where we must observe, he does not give thanks because they had been sinners; but because they had renounced the service of sin, and become sincerely obedient to the laws of Christ.

And, that the characters of obedient and disobedient professors might be duly discriminated from each other, he says again—*I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them: for they that are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly—their own carnal conceits—and, by good words and fair speeches, deceive the hearts of the simple: for your obedience is*

come abroad unto all men. (Rom. xvi. 17, &c.)

By this passage we are taught, that, in a sincere course of obedience to the laws of Christ, there is no occasion of offence or division; that offences and divisions are gross instances of disobedience to those laws; and that those men who, by their crafty and imposing speeches, introduce such disorders, are not the real servants of the Lord, and are therefore to be avoided.

In another place the apostle sets forth to the church of Corinth, the labours of his spiritual warfare, in *casting down imaginations*, or vain and conceited reasonings, *and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God*—against the purity of revealed truth—and *bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*; and *having in readiness to revenge all disobedience*—to restrain it by authoritative discipline—*when your obedience is fulfilled.* (2 Cor. x. 5, 6.)

By this we see that the principle of disobedience exists in the imaginations and vain thoughts of presuming men. These human devices are to be cast down, that the

obedience of the church may be simple and sincere—may be held as of equal necessity with the profession of a sound faith. And the reason is plain: for *Christ is become the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him*—(Heb. v. 9.)—and to them only.

And, as obedience in general is a duty of indispensable obligation to the disciples of Christ; so, in particular, a due submission to the authorised ministers of the Gospel, and, therefore, to the subject of their ministry, is necessary for preserving the unity of the church: and the obligation of this submission is enforced by our Lord himself.

When he sent forth his twelve apostles to proclaim the approach of the kingdom of heaven, and to heal the sick, he thus denounces the judgment of those who should reject their ministry:—*Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.* (Matt. xi. 14, 15.)

Again, in the same chapter he declares:—*He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he*

that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me.
 And again, in another place—*He that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.*
 (Luke, x. 16.)

Such is the sanction of that law by which a due submission to the authorised ministers of Christ is enjoined. And the apostles acknowledge the compliance of the church with this religious duty. Thus St. Paul testifies of the Galatians—*My temptation, which was in the flesh, ye despised not nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.* (Gal. iv. 14.) And again, he peremptorily declares to the church of the Thessalonians—*He, therefore, that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit.* (1 Thess. iv. 8.)

As obedience and respect, in the office of their ministry, are thus claimed by the apostles, according to the ordinance of God, and in virtue of the sacred commission which they bear; so we find the same duty is also binding in behalf of those duly appointed ministers who supplied their place,

and succeeded them in the care of the church.

When St. Paul sent Titus to Corinth for the work of the ministry, he confidently assured him that he would be received by the church with that respect and attention which were due to his office and character. The apostle's expectation, in this particular, was amply verified, as he afterwards acknowledges.—*Our boasting, says he, which I made before Titus, is found a truth; and his inward affection is more abundant toward you, whilst he remembereth the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling ye received him. I rejoice, therefore, that I have confidence in you in all things.* (2 Cor. vii. 14.)

And again, when he sendeth one of his fellow-soldiers and companions in labour to the church at Philippi, it is with this injunction—*Receive him, therefore, in the Lord, with all gladness; and hold such in reputation.* (Phil. ii. 29.)

In the first epistle to the Thessalonians, the duty of paying just respect to the authorised ministers of the church, is thus inter-

woven in a charge to preserve its unity and internal tranquillity : — *Wherefore, comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do : and we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you ; and to esteem them very highly in love, for their work's sake : and be at peace among yourselves.* (1 Thess. v. 11—13.)

Timothy is thus instructed in the government of the church : *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.* (1 Tim. v. 17.)

And finally, the thirteenth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews contains some remarkable passages to the same purpose.—*Remember them, says the apostle, which have the rule over you—an official charge of superintendence—who have spoken unto you the word of God ; WHOSE FAITH FOLLOW, considering the end of their conversation : Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. Be not carried about with various and strange doctrines ; for it is a good thing that the heart should be established with grace.* (Heb. xiii. 7—9.) And again :

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you. (v. 17.)

Thus it appears that, in the apostolical church, the ministers and people are placed in a state of mutual obligation and responsibility. The former are entrusted with a commission to superintend the flock, to direct and instruct them in the pure faith and holy discipline of the Gospel. As this is a most weighty charge, upon the due execution of which the welfare of the church greatly depends, we find they must render to their common Master a strict account of their stewardship. The people, on the other hand, are required to hold their ministers in high respect and honour. It is not meant that they should indulge them in whatever self-importance they may think proper to assume; for personal respect must, in a great degree, depend on the personal character which the individual supports; but ministers are to be respected, in their official capacity, with a reverential regard to him whose authority they bear.

It is also required of the people to submit to the ministers of Christ, as vested with his authority, to receive the faith and the rules of Christian conduct which they teach out of the Holy Scripture, as coming from Christ himself: not to give heed to various and strange religious doctrines, which originate in human imagination; but to take care that their heart be established in the divine grace of the Gospel; for they also are concerned in the account which their ministers must render to God, being responsible for the improvement or abuse which they have made of the means of salvation.

And a religious observance of the duties which arise from this mutual relation; between the ministers and people, is an essential part of that general obedience which is required to the laws of Christ. And it is even contrary to human reason, to suppose that any of his disciples has a right to dispense with this obedience, upon which the unity and harmony of his church necessarily depend.

Were we to hear the subject of a civil state exclaiming in the streets, "*Of those*

*magistrates who are regularly commissioned by our sovereign, I take not the least account. I am free. I have a right to constitute what magistrates I please, and am determined to acknowledge none but those who are of my own choosing:—*Were he to open the volumes of the law in our presence, declaring, *"In this statute I perceive a fitness and propriety, and am, therefore, content to observe it; but as for that clause and the next, I wholly reject them, and counsel all my friends to resist their operation:—*Were he to say, when called upon for his contribution to the support of government, *"All those taxes which are imposed upon me by the statutes of the realm I am resolved to disallow: to pay them, were an offence to my principles, and to my conscience. I will contribute what I think proper, in what way I please, and when it suits my own convenience. But this I will not pay to the appointed officers. I am the proper judge of those persons who ought to receive my bounty:—*—Were we to hear such language and witness such conduct, should we not be impressed with a full conviction of this man's disaffection to the lawful government—

should we not dread the propagation of his pernicious principles?

But were the same disorderly person to proceed—" *I am high in the favour of our wise and righteous king. So peculiar is his regard for me, that whatever my judgment and will dispose me to do, is, in his estimation, the best that can be done: and I am confident he will promote me to a rank high above all those who inculcate the observance of his written laws, and study to enforce their regular execution.*"—such a speech would immediately change our sentiments. We should no longer abhor the rebel, but begin to pity the maniac.

Yet such precisely is the conduct, and such, in effect, the language of many who call themselves the followers of our blessed Lord, *but do not the things which he commands.* And so great is the blindness of mankind in matters of religion, that even these deluded persons have influence enough to draw away multitudes of disciples after them, whilst the awful sanctions of the Gospel, and the care of their own immortal souls, prove insufficient to impress this great

and simple truth, That the church of Christ is constituted as one undivided body, and that it is required of every Christian, in the pale of this union, *to observe all things whatsoever he commanded his apostles.*



SERMON VIII.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

MATT. XXVIII. 20.

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.

THAT no great sin can be committed without some heinous act of impiety against the Supreme Being, some notorious crime against the order and welfare of society, or some remarkable vice which debases the private character below the standard of fashion and popular opinion, is an idea too prevalent amongst us. An offence in either of these respects, is certainly a grievous sin; yet the simple and primary notion of sin, is the transgression of a declared law and ordinance of God. Hence, as Christ is a teacher come from God, universal obedience to his laws, and an unfeigned observance of all things which he appointed in the constitution of his church, are indispensably required of all his disciples, as they

would avoid the imputation of sin, and the danger of its punishment.

It therefore behoves every one of us seriously to consider how far these laws extend; and to take special care, that we do not heedlessly or presumptuously, upon selfish motives, or with the palliation of a separate judgment, dare to transgress what we may deem *the least commandment*. For this is the original blemish of our nature, for which the Son of God shed his blood upon the cross. And that nothing contributes more to the forfeiture of God's favour, than a careless neglect of his positive ordinances, is a momentous truth, inculcated throughout the Holy Scriptures. Of this I shall, upon the present occasion, lay before you some remarkable instances.

When our first parent came before his offended Maker, sinking with shame and confusion, and trembling with conscious guilt, he was not asked—*Hast thou dishonoured my holy name? Hast thou injured the partner whom I gave for your comfort? or, Hast thou cruelly treated those creatures which I had made subject to thy power? But—Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee, that thou shouldest not eat?*

Hast thou disobeyed my voice, and transgressed my sovereign decree?

The eating of an apple, from a tree growing in that very garden which was committed to his care, must have been an offence trivial in itself, and such as, in these days of liberty, would scarcely be deemed an offence at all. But the sin did not consist in this act, *simply considered*. It lay in the transgression of that law, by which the act was prohibited: and the laws of God are as sacred, at this moment, as they were in the day of the creation. And the influence, under which the law was then violated, appears to have been the same which still leads men into numberless transgressions; namely, that of a separate and deliberative judgment, set up in opposition to a sacred duty.

The woman avows her knowledge of an absolute interdiction, pronounced by God himself. She could therefore have no right to deliberate. But she did deliberate. *And when she saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat. This was an act deliberately committed,*

against a known law, and upon selfish motives. The fruit, in the first place, allured her sensual appetite; and self-love prompted her to indulge that appetite:—*the tree was good for food*. In the next place, it recommended itself to her fancy:—it was *pleasant to the eyes*; and her separate judgment complied with the gratification of her vanity. And, in the last place, it flattered her pride:—*it was a tree to be desired to make one wise*. And thus sin gradually rose to the summit of its climax. If a separate judgment be allowed to act at all, in opposition to the laws of divine order, it is impossible for it to withstand such motives as those which presented themselves to our first mother. They are so powerful and universally prevalent, that St. John, with manifest allusion to this history, declares, that all the evil which is in the world consists in *the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life*. (1 John, ii. 16.)

These are the things which introduced sin into the world; and they still operate whenever we attend to selfish motives, and allow the deliberation of a separate judgment, in opposition to the declared will of God. Eve

began to sin the moment she began to deliberate. She had attended to a false and seducing teacher. Her judgment, now perverted, promised her greater happiness, in the gratification of her appetite, her vanity, and her pride, than in a persevering obedience to the command of her Maker.

As for Adam, his motive to sin was one which is at this day too prevalent in the world—he implicitly followed a corrupt example. *The woman took of the fruit, and did eat: and she gave to her husband with her, and he did eat.*

This act, however trivial in itself, was an act of disobedience to a declared law of God; and to what a height of impiety it presently rose from this low beginning, we may easily judge, when we hear the offender casting the blame upon his Creator, for having placed a seducer in his bosom:—*The woman, says he, whom thou gavest to be with me—she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.*

Thus we see that sin, in its original form, even that sin which humbled the whole race of Adam, resolves itself into an act of disobedience to a positive law; and an act

perpetrated under the presumed liberty to exercise a separate judgment.

How closely this blemish adhered to our nature may be learned from those pathetic exhortations to obedience, from the many blessings promised to it, and from the dreadful woes denounced against disobedience, which the great lawgiver of Israel has left upon record, throughout the book of Deuteronomy. And, under the Mosaic dispensation, we have frequent examples of the punishment of disobedience, and neglect of the divine law, even in cases which we should be too apt to deem perfectly venial, and some of which had very plausible circumstances in their favour.

Thus, it was a declared commandment of God, that his holy name should be held in reverence. And this law was not to be disobeyed with impunity. Accordingly, we are told that when two men strove in the camp of Israel, one of them blasphemed, or spoke lightly of the name of the Lord, and uttered curses. Here an act of disobedience must be admitted. But then it might be pleaded, in mitigation of punishment,

that the offence was committed under the impulse of momentary rage. This, however, was no excuse. The Lord commanded—*Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head; and let all the congregation stone him.* (Lev. xxiv. 10, &c.) Again—

God commanded that the sabbath-day should be kept holy. But *while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks on the sabbath-day.* This action was trivial in itself, and so it must have been in the judgment of the offender. But it was an act of disobedience: therefore the Lord said—*The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones, without the camp.* And this sentence was executed. (Numb. xv. 32, &c.)

The Lord commanded that the *Israelites should hold the spoils of the Canaanites in abomination, and should not desire their silver nor their gold.* (Deut. vii. 25, 26.)

But, in contempt of this precept, one of the men in Joshua's army secreted part of the spoil. In consequence of this trans-

gression, there was wrath upon the whole congregation, and the Lord refused to go forth with Israel any more, till the offender should have been punished with death. (Josh. vii.)

The men of Beth-Shemesh disobeyed an express command, by profanely looking into the ark of the Lord; and their sin was punished with the death of more than fifty thousand persons. (1 Sam. vi. 19.)

We also learn, that the venerable Eli was a righteous priest of the Lord; but his sons committed such trespasses as would have been disgraceful in any professors of a holy religion, and were utterly heinous in the sacred office which they filled. And though the Lord had authorised and commanded parents effectually to restrain the crimes and vices of their children, (Deut. xxi. 10, &c.), Eli neglected the enforcement of this law, and satisfied his conscience with the mildness of parental reproof:—*He said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil doings by all this people. Nay, my sons, for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall*

judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him?

This kind parental reproof would have suited one of the good fathers of the present day: but this was not obeying the commandment of God; it was not fulfilling the duty of a judge of Israel. There was, therefore, a severe denunciation of wrath against Eli, for this mistaken tenderness to his sons; and the reward of disobedience overwhelmed himself, and his whole family, in one dreadful day. (1 Sam. ii. and iv.)

Very remarkable also was the punishment of disobedience in the case of Saul. At a time when he was at war with a formidable enemy, the prophet Samuel sent him forward to Gilgal, and promised to follow him, in the space of seven days, to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord. (1 Sam. x. 8.) He waited the seven days, but the prophet was not come. The enemy in the meantime were advancing to attack him, with thirty thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude. When the men of Israel saw this, they were in a strait; for the people were distressed, and hid

themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits, and some of them fled over Jordan. As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all that remained of his army followed him trembling. The time appointed had elapsed: the prophet was not come. The enemy was surrounding him, and his own forces were dispersing on every side.

In this distress he began to deliberate, and took the resolution to offer a burnt offering. Under such circumstances, this decision of private judgment must surely be deemed venial, if private judgment can ever be allowed to decide in opposition to a sacred ordinance. But no sooner was the act perpetrated, than the prophet came, and denounced to Saul the forfeiture of his kingdom, as a punishment of his disobedience, and of his presumption, in taking upon himself the exercise of a sacred office to which he had not been appointed.

On another occasion, the same prince is sent, by the command of the Lord, utterly to destroy the Amalekites. Here, again, he deliberates in the execution of his charge, and saves the king of Amalek alive. He

also brings back the best of the flocks and herds, to sacrifice unto the Lord. But he is thus reproved by the prophet:—*Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.* (1 Sam. xv. 22, 23.)

Obedience to the divine command is, then, a duty which no palliative circumstance, no right of private judgment, can set aside; excepting in cases of omission, at such times when a ritual ordinance happens to interfere with a moral duty.

The punishment of Uzza is another example, which proves that no plausible excuse, or favourable circumstance, can justify an act of disobedience. We read, that when David was conveying the ark of the Lord to its place, in a new cart, this Israelite *put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it, because the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was*

kindled against Uzza, and God smote him there, for his error, and there he died, by the ark of God. (2 Sam. vi. 6, 7.) The Lord had committed his ark to the charge of the priests, and had commanded that none of the people should touch any holy thing, on pain of death. The act of Uzza was a transgression of this law; and neither his mistaken zeal, nor even his pious intention, could atone for his disobedience.

Again; it was an ordinance of God, that his prophets should be treated with honour and respect, in consideration of the sacred character which they bore. (Numb. xii. 8, 9.) When, therefore, Ahaziah's officers, contemning this law, came in an irreverent manner to summon Elijah into the presence of their master, the prophet commanded, *and fire came down from heaven, and consumed them and their companies. (2 Kings, i. 10, &c.)* And when another prophet was mocked, even by little children, who met him as he was going up into Bethel, he cursed them in the name of the Lord, and two bears came out of the wood, and tore forty and two of them. (2 Kings, ii. 23, 24.)

By men of greater presumption than

piety, these and similar passages have been adduced, as furnishing the most shocking proof of the cruelty and inhumanity of the ancient prophets. But is it not the part of a right judgment to advance one step further, to take a higher ground, where it must be perceived that prophets were not distinguished from other men by any power inherent in themselves; that the miracles which confirmed their word were not performed by human means, but by the spirit of God; and, therefore, that these miracles, as acts of the Almighty, must have been essentially right, and must be acknowledged as examples of the displeasure of God, at the sin of disobedience and contempt of his laws? But it will be objected by others, that these examples occurred under the rigour of the Mosaic dispensation, and, consequently, that they are altogether foreign to the merciful economy of the Gospel.

Such language is not uncommon. It is, however, a dreadful mistake, to suppose that the Gospel shews more indulgence to sin than the law of Moses; or that it denounces on the offence of disobedience a

punishment less certain, or less severe. On the contrary, as it has given us a clearer and more extensive prospect of our duty, so it has expressly declared, that, *to whom much is given, of him much will be required*; and it has taught us, that *the servant who offends, through a comparative ignorance of his Lord's will, shall be beaten with few stripes; whilst that servant who knoweth his Lord's will, and prepareth not himself, neither doeth according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.* (Luke, xii. 47, 48.) This is the law of equity, and it is the law of the Gospel. Both the covenants which God made with man were dictated by the same spirit—by that spirit which is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Their difference with respect to the sanctions of obedience is only this;—the Mosaic law, being designed for a single nation, which occupied a narrow territory, constituted the civil code of that nation. Its sanctions were, therefore, of a temporal kind, and the punishment of disobedience was public, and immediate. Whereas the Gospel, which embraces all the nations of the earth, is of a more spiritual nature. As it has, by

ascertaining the resurrection of Christ, demonstrated the certainty of a future state; as it has declared the responsibility of every man, at an appointed day of judgment, which is yet to come; so it has, for the most part, deferred the punishment of disobedience to the solemnity of that great day.

Consequently, enormous offences have been committed under the Gospel, with an appearance of temporal impunity. Thus, when one of our Lord's chosen disciples, with a seeming exertion of *reason*, and of *zeal*, in *reforming abuses*, and professing an extraordinary degree of *sympathy with the poor*, but, at the same time, forgetting that respect and submission which were due to his divine Master, presumed to blame an action which that Master both allowed and approved;—when this pretended *reformer* and *philanthropist* exclaims with indignation—*Why was this waste of the ointment made? for it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor.* (Mark, xiv. 8, 4);—we do not find that this act of disrespect and insubordination was immediately punish-

ed. The offender was dismissed, with this gentle rebuke—*Let her alone; why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will, ye may do them good; but me ye have not always: as much as if our Lord had said, "Ye have always an opportunity of exercising your benevolence to the poor; but, let not that important duty interfere with the other claims of religion."*

The same disciple, on another occasion, approached his master at a time when he was in great affliction, and saluted him with apparent kindness and respect. This was, indeed, a preconcerted signal to point him out to his enemies, who were now seeking his life; but the private judgment of the offender may have suggested to him, that he had now a fair opportunity of promoting his own interest at a trifling risk, and gratifying a feeling of resentment for the late rebuke; that the known goodness of his Lord would easily forgive him; that his miraculous power would immediately defeat the purpose of his enemies; and that he himself was only furnishing an occasion for

the display of that power. Such may have been his ideas; for it appears, from the sequel of his history, that he did not expect what really followed; and that, like a self-sufficient, *rational Christian*, he did not implicitly *believe all the words that Jesus had spoken*. But, whatever his thoughts may have been, the deed was done. The offender was not immediately punished. His Lord only said to him—*Friend, wherefore art thou come! Betrayest thou the son of man with a kiss?*

Thus we see that, under the Gospel economy, the execution of wrath does not always immediately follow the offence. But, notwithstanding the gentleness and forbearance of our divine Law-giver, Judas, the *rational Christian*—the *zealous reformer*—the *virtuous economist*—the *distinguished friend of the poor*—and the *respectful greeter of his master*, had no reason to congratulate with himself upon the prudent choice he had made: he fell a victim to the remorse of conscience. And it is but little consolation to those who, under the merciful dispensation of the Gospel, presume to disobey the laws of order, that

they have the prospect of escaping, *as he escaped.*

Yet, that no Christian might lose sight of the awful sanctions by which obedience to the law of holiness is enforced, the New Testament contains some remarkable instances of the temporal punishment of the disobedient. The conscience of Judas produced one of these examples: the history of Ananias and Saphira furnishes another; which occurred at the very time when the apostolical church was first established. And here we are presented with a practical lesson. We are told, that, in the infant state of the church, *as many as were possessors of lands or houses, sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man, according as he had need.* (Acts, iii.)

This regulation, which arose from temporary expediency, does not appear to have been enforced by a general law of the church. Those who did not claim a share in the distribution, were not compelled to resign their property: for St. Peter says to Ananias, *while it remained, was it not thine own; and*

after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? The crime of this man and his wife consisted in this:—Having *partially* contributed to the common stock, they pretended to have laid down their whole property; and upon this pretence they claimed, as members of the church, their full proportion in the distribution that was to be made: thus committing an act of fraud, under the semblance of an honest zeal for the cause of religion.

As it was naturally to be expected that similar offences would be committed by men of worldly minds; that such men would vainly pretend to the full privileges of the church, without submitting to their share of its burdens; it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, that these dissembling professors should be punished with immediate death, as examples to all future ages. And if there be any Ananiases in the present day, they may be assured that the ways of God are still equal; that he does not punish one and excuse another for the same crime. Notwithstanding, therefore, many escape with impunity in this life, they only *treasure up unto themselves wrath, against*

the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. (Rom. ii. 5.) When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that OBEY NOT THE GOSPEL OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. (2 Thess. i. 7, 8.)

That we may all obtain mercy in that day, may God give us grace, not only to acknowledge the true faith of the Gospel of Christ, but also to observe all things *whatsoever he commanded his apostles*. So shall we have our fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

SERMON IX.

OF CHARITY, THE BOND OF UNION.

JOHN, XIII. 35.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

THE great bond by which the faithful and obedient members of Christ's church are preserved in perfect union and harmony with each other, is CHARITY, or mutual love: and without this, their fellowship cannot be complete. For men may assent to the same principles of faith, and, externally, observe the same rules of conduct, whilst they are wholly disunited amongst themselves in heart and affection. But Christianity extends its influence beyond the profession of the life, and the going of the feet: its great office is, to bind the heart with the bond of charity.

And as charity is essentially necessary to the perfection of union, and the maintenance of harmony, in the flock of Christ, so it is most expressly and indispensably

enjoined in his Gospel.—*A new commandment, says our Lord, I give unto you, that ye love one another : as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.* And the observance of this duty is the most prominent characteristic of his true followers ; for it is added—*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

From these words it is evident that the virtue of mutual love was to manifest itself in the uniform and public behaviour of Christians ; otherwise it could not become notorious, and the subject of remark to *all men*, or to the world in general. Its operation, therefore, was to pervade, not only the spiritual and invisible, but also the *visible church*. Accordingly, our Lord prays for those who should believe in him through the word of his apostles, that is, for the Christians of all nations, and of all succeeding ages—*that they all may be one.* And this he does with the same reference to the general conviction that must result from their visible and ostensible union—*that the world may know that thou hast sent me.* (John, xvii. 21.)

This principle of union, then, which is seated in the heart, the proper throne of charity, is required to diffuse its influence to the external behaviour of every member in the visible church of Christ; so as to render itself the subject of daily observation to all mankind.

— And in this light the divine command of our great Master is understood and enforced throughout the writings of his apostles.

Walk in love, saith St. Paul, *as Christ also loved us.* (Eph. v. 2.) **WALK IN LOVE, that is, Regulate your deportment in the sight of the world, according to the principle of mutual charity.** (11. OF 11)

And again:—*As touching brotherly love, ye need not that I should write unto you; for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And, indeed, ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia; but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more—that ye MAY WALK HONESTLY TOWARD THEM THAT ARE WITHOUT.* (1 Thess. iv. 9—12.)

—*If ye fulfil the royal law,* saith St. James, *according to the Scripture—Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself—ye do well.* (James,

ii. 8.) So also St. Peter:—*Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.* (1 Pet. i. 22.)

St. John declares—*He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and THERE IS NONE OCCASION OF STUMBLING in him—*his conduct neither gives offence to the church, nor reflects discredit on his profession;—*but he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes.* (1 John, ii. 10, 11.)

Again:—*In this the children of God ARE MANIFEST, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother: for this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that ye love one another.* (1 John, iii. 10, 11.) And yet further:—*This is his commandment, That ye should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.* (V. 23.) Of such importance is this great duty, that we presently find it

again inculcated :—*This commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also.* (Chap. iv. 21.)

Such are the injunctions with which this duty of charity is enforced,—such the appeals that are made from its visible operation to the minds of mankind in general.

The same great lesson is so emphatically and so repeatedly impressed, that from hence some men have been ready to suppose that charity comprises nearly the whole of practical religion, and consequently have circumscribed the peculiar duty of Christians, by the limits of mutual forbearance and brotherly love.

Without charity, it is true, there can be no perfect union amongst Christians; and Christianity itself, as it is taught in the Gospel, cannot subsist without it. But one part of religion, though a principal part, will not stand for another, much less for the whole. To guard, therefore, against any mistake of this kind, the apostles, in recommending to their converts the practice of this virtue, have taken care to recommend it in conjunction with faith and obedience.

Watch ye, saith St. Paul to the Corin-

thians—*Watch ye : stand fast in the faith : quit you like men : be strong. Let all your things be done with charity. I beseech you, brethren—ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia; and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints—that ye submit yourselves to such, and to every one that helpeth with us and laboureth.* (1 Cor. xvi. 13—16.) Here we perceive the great duty of charity guarded, on the one hand, with the necessity of vigilance and steadfastness in the profession of the true faith; and, on the other, with the duty of submission to the authorised ministers of the Gospel—to every one who helped and laboured with the apostles. And the great apostle of the Gentiles, in the midst of his afflictions, is comforted by the good tidings which he receives of the faith as well as of the charity of the Thessalonians; (1 Thess. iii. 6.); to whom he says, in another place—*We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you toward each other aboundeth.* (2 Thess. i. 3.) Timothy receives instruction, That it is

required of Christian matrons to continue in faith, in charity, and in holiness, with sobriety. (1 Tim. ii. 15.) And to the same apostolical bishop it is given in charge—Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. (1 Tim. iv. 12.)

In like manner Titus is commanded—Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine—That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in the faith, in charity, in patience. (Tit. ii. 1, 2.)

And to the whole church of Christ this charge is delivered by St. Peter:—Giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. i. 5, 8.)

From all which it is plain that, as without charity it is impossible to be a practical Christian, so, on the other hand, no degree

of this divine virtue, no liberality of spirit, no overflowing of benevolence, will constitute a true disciple of Christ, unless it be attended with purity of faith and sincerity of obedience.

Charity is not to be cultivated instead of any one Christian grace; but it is the ornament and perfection of them all. And being intimately blended with the essential requisites of pure religion, it becomes the great principle of harmony and union in the flock of our Redeemer.

Our Lord, as we have already seen, prayed to his Almighty Father, that all the members of his church *might be made perfect in one*. What was to be the general connecting bond of this perfect union? It was Christian charity; or that mutual love and benevolence which Christ had enjoined to all his disciples. Hence St. Paul charges the church of Colosse—*Above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness*—(Col. iii. 14.)—that is, of the perfect union which our Lord requires amongst his disciples. And the same apostle reminds the Ephesians to be continually attentive to this great and essential duty,

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. iv. 3.)

And how adequate this Christian principle is to the preservation of peace, and the perfecting of the communion of saints, may be collected from the enumeration of its qualities which St. Paul has given us in his first epistle to the Corinthians.

This celebrated passage has been the subject of frequent comment: but it has not been sufficiently considered in the connection in which it really stands. It is introduced by the apostle as part of a solemn charge, in which he enforces the absolute necessity of *union* in the church of Christ. That church he represents, in the preceding chapter, as one individual body:—*For as the body, saith he, is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ—so is Christ, as united with his undivided church.* Therefore the apostle proceeds to enforce the charge—*that there should be no schism in the body; but that all the members should have the same care one for another.* And as he continues—*whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it: or one member be*

honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

Each of you is a member of that one undivided body, the whole of which is pervaded by one vital principle, and every part of which has a mutual feeling and affection with all its fellow-members. This can never be the case if schisms and separations prevail amongst you.

Therefore, the apostle adds, *God hath set in the church*—hath expressly appointed an ordinate gradation of ministers for the preservation of due harmony in this one body.

Having described the several departments of the ministry, and exhorted the members of this one church *to covet earnestly the best gifts*—to endeavour to excel each other in usefulness for the general edification—he proceeds, *And yet shew I unto you a more excellent way*—A way to what? A way, as the construction of language and the consequences of argument demonstrate, to the preservation of this perfect unity of the church, this communication of feeling and affection, and the avoiding of conten-

tion and schism, which destroy the unity of the body.

And this way is *charity*. The way of charity is often spoken of in our days, as allowing free scope for divisions and separations of all kinds: but how has the apostle described it?—*Charity suffereth long, and is kind. Charity envyeth not. Charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity; but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things: Charity never faileth!*

We see, then, that the charity which the apostle recommends is a most comprehensive principle; but within its ample limits there is no place for division. It lays an effectual restraint upon all those errors into which men are prone to be seduced by an excess of self-love, or a fondness for their own opinions. It humbles the proud spirit of insubordination. It checks every instance of rash judgment; puts upon every thing the best construction which it will fairly bear, and makes to others every con-

cession which is consistent with *truth and integrity*. Can they deserve the name of Christians whom this amiable principle will not unite?

Such is the nature of that charity which constitutes the perfect bond of union in the church of Christ. And it is so essential to the character of his disciples, that from them it must flow, in its proper gradation, to all mankind.

For it is our Lord's command—*Love your enemies: bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father, which is in heaven. For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.* (Matt. v. 44, 45.)

But the love here enjoined is that of benevolence or good-will, not of esteem and approbation: for, comprehensive as the influence of this divine principle certainly is, we never find that it is the part of Christian charity to countenance error, dissension, and division. Its proper office is not to authorise, but to prevent them: and where this good end cannot be obtained, charity

still disposes us to preserve a friendly and benevolent disposition—not to cherish a spirit of rancour and hatred, or seek an opportunity for revenge—to recommend the offender to the *mercy*, and not to the *judgment* of God—to pray for his *reformation*, *not for his punishment*.

But in no instance whatsoever must true charity be directed to the extinction of a temperate zeal in a good cause, to the corruption of our principles, or the perversion of our judgment. We are not enjoined by charity to forbear with any thing that is expressly forbidden in the Gospel; to regard essential truths, or the corruption of those truths, as things indifferent; or to connive, with affected liberality, at the manifest errors and irregularities of men.

Our Saviour, whose practice is the best comment upon his precepts, thought it no breach of charity to reprove the profane conceits and infidelity of the Sadducees; to pronounce a solemn woe upon the pride, ostentation, and hypocrisy, of the Pharisees; or to testify in the face of the Samaritan separatists—*Ye worship ye know not what*.

It was no part of his benevolence to dis-

semble the difference between truth and error, righteousness and iniquity, obedience and disobedience; or to palliate, in the ears of men, the severity of that account which they must render of their deeds in the last day.

The apostles of Christ, with equal frankness, recommend Christian charity under its just and necessary limitations.—*Now the end of the commandment, saith St. Paul, is charity.* (1 Tim. i. 5.) *But what charity?* Does he mean an easy concession to the opinions and optional practices of men, such as the liberality of our days—a charity which abstains from reproof, and marks neither error nor corruption? Far from it. It is *charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience and faith unfeigned.* And to shew us that this charity is not a principle of *indiscriminate* forbearance, it is immediately added—*From which some, having swerved, have turned aside into vain jangling, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor whereof they affirm.* That charity, then, which is *the end of the commandment*, is not blind to the vain conceit and ignorant presumption of these

false teachers, nor does it abstain from an open reprehension of their proceedings. St. Paul goes further—he uses active means to restrain their pernicious practices: for we are told, in the preceding verses, that he has left Timothy at Ephesus, for the express purpose *that he may charge some that they teach no other doctrine.*

In another place he proposes to the same Timothy, his own apostolical character as a model for his imitation:—*But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience.* (2 Tim. iii. 10.)

Here let us pause—*Long-suffering, charity, patience!* Where these good qualities in the apostle's own character are pointed out for the imitation of those ministers who are to succeed him in the government of the church, we might expect to find, if anywhere in the New Testament, that accommodating spirit which resolves the essentials of Christianity into sincerity of devotion, under the sole direction of private judgment, and takes the profession of men as a sufficient credential of that sincerity.

With what surprise, then, and disappoint-

ment, must the advocate of modern liberality peruse the context!—*This know also, saith the apostle, that, in the last days, perilous times shall come; for men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.*

The characters which are here exhibited with all this selfishness, arrogance, contempt of every virtue, relative and personal, and violation of every law, sacred and human, public and private—such characters cannot surely be recognised in civil society, unless it be amongst the thoughtless and profane, who live without hope, and without God in the world. So it might be thought; but this is not the apostle's meaning. The men are professors of religion in their way—*having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.*—Not producing those fruits which necessarily spring from true godliness: or even worse than this—denying that godliness ought to produce the fruits of righteousness.

But how was the great principle of charity to operate in behalf of such professors? Was the faithful minister of the Gospel to acknowledge them as *dissenting brethren*—to connive at their irregularities—to make allowance for the *tenderness of conscience*, the *freedom of opinion*, and the *rights of private judgment*?—those general pleas of disorder and insubordination! No! The commandment is—*From such, turn away!*

Let us, then, consider their character more attentively, that they may be distinctly known in order to be thus avoided: for as we now live in those *last and perilous days*, we must suppose that some such characters have already appeared.

We find that they are not only nominal professors, but pretended *teachers* also, though *separatists* from the church. For—as the apostle continues his bold but accurate sketches—*For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women*—persons of weak minds and little reflection—*laden with sins*—amongst some sectaries we have heard as a maxim, “The greater the sinner, the greater the saint.”—*led away*—that is, seduced from the apos-

tolical church—with *divers lusts*—with a variety of irregular desires and visionary fancies—*ever learning*—professing a continual reform and improvement in the system of religion—but *never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*—never apprehending the pure truth of the Gospel. Now as Jannes and Jambres—the Egyptian wizards—*withstood Moses*—the authorised minister of God—*so do these also resist the truth*—their mind is always fruitful in cavils and trivial objections.—*Men of corrupt minds*—heady and self-conceited—*reprobate concerning the faith*—void of judgment, as to the immutable faith of the Gospel.

But—the apostle adds—*they shall proceed no further*—they may resist, but they shall not overthrow the truth; the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church;—*for their folly shall be manifest to all men, as that of the Egyptian wizards also was.*

Notwithstanding this general exposure of their folly, they discover no marks of a salutary reformation: they return not to the bosom of the church: for *evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse; deceiving and being deceived.*

How needful, then, was the charge which the apostle subjoins to the bishop of the Ephesians!—*But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them*—that is, not of a self-appointed and fanciful teacher, but of an authorised and faithful minister of Christ. (2 Tim. iii.)

Such is the discrimination of error and corruption; and such the freedom of censure and reproof with which the *long suffering*, the *charity*, and the *patience*, of the apostles are tempered and qualified; and such the charge to *avoid the erroneous and the corrupt*, and to *continue steadfast in the faith and discipline of the Gospel*, which marks that very passage, in which these forbearing virtues are recommended, to the imitation of the ministers of Christ.

Upon the whole, then, it appears, from a due consideration of the precepts of our Lord himself and his apostles, compared with their example and practice, that Christian charity is not a principle which disposes us to *please* upon all occasions—to sacrifice conscience and integrity at the altar of peace—to accommodate, or even to

countenance, any kind of disorder in the nominal professors of our religion. The very essence of this virtue is *benevolence* : it therefore disposes us, at all times, to desire, and, whenever we can, to promote, the good of mankind without distinction—to abstain from evil—to preserve a just regard to the feelings of others, but without violating the integrity of our own consciences. Its operation, therefore, though always *salutary*, is not always *pleasing* ; and when duly exercised amongst the faithful and obedient members of Christ's church, it becomes the great bond of peace and union, which gives to that church its visible grace, its harmony, and perfection.

Let us, then, my brethren, in obedience to our Lord's command, have love one to another : for thus shall we be preserved in the unity of his church, and all men shall know that we are his true disciples.

SERMON X.

OF THE LAW OF DISCIPLINE.

2 COR. XIII. 10.

I write these things, being absent, lest, being present, I should use sharpness according to THE POWER WHICH THE LORD HATH GIVEN ME TO EDIFICATION, AND NOT TO DESTRUCTION.

THE Christian religion in the days of the apostles, and for some ages afterwards, was not countenanced and supported by any public and national authority. No civil power espoused its cause. Hence it becomes a question worthy of our attention, Under what sanction and by what law was due order maintained amongst its numerous professors, and the censure of discipline, when necessary, effectually enforced?

That there was some such law, that it was a law of the Lord, and that it was confirmed and ratified by powerful sanctions, so that, upon urgent occasions, it

might be exercised with *sharpness*, are particulars which we learn from the words of the text, as well as from many other passages of the New Testament.

In order to discover how any law of discipline could be thus sanctioned without the aid of the civil arm, and what that law was to which the primitive Christians actually submitted, let us first of all consider the constitution of the apostolical church.

This church consisted of one community, or spiritual body politic; for, however its members were locally dispersed, they were all united into one fraternity, by the profession of the same faith, by an uniform obedience to the precepts of the Gospel, and by the common bond of charity or brotherly love. This fraternity of believers was placed under the care of the apostles, and of those ministers whom the apostles should officially constitute and appoint. And beyond the limits of this united fraternity, the acknowledged church of Christ did not extend. It included no sectaries. Neither Christ himself nor his apostles recognised any professors who separated themselves from this constituted body,

either upon principles of faith, or rules of government and discipline. Our Lord, indeed, had foretold, that many such separatists should come in his name, saying, *Lo ! here is Christ, or Lo, there !* but the general charge to his disciples is—*Go not after them, nor follow them.*

Here, then, we may perceive the grounds of sanction, by which the law of discipline might be enforced. As union and fellowship with the apostolical church were essential to the very being of a Christian, so a due submission to the internal regulations of that church was requisite to preserve the individual in its essential unity. And it was by this sanction that a law of wholesome discipline was ratified and enforced for the edification of the church, for the maintenance of Christian obedience, and the preservation of good order and a godly conversation.

Under the operation of this discipline, smaller offences were corrected by admonition, reproof, and brotherly censure ; but the obstinate and irreclaimable was punished by a separation from the communion of the brotherhood.

And such a law of discipline was promul-

gated and authorised by our Lord himself; who directs, that the offending brother, if he first of all despise private admonition, and then neglect to hear the church, is to be regarded *as an heathen man, and a publican*. Thus we find, that the church derived from its great Master a power of censure, extending so far as to place the contumacious out of its communion and fellowship; and this power is vested in the apostles, and their duly constituted successors. For our Lord immediately adds—*Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.* (Matt. xviii. 17, 18.) And again, just before his ascension, he solemnly commits this same power to his apostles, in the following words:—*Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.* (John, xx. 23.)

From hence it is clear, that the censures and absolutions which the authorised ministers of the Gospel justly and officially pronounce for the orderly government of the church, are recognised at a higher tribunal. And this is the power which St. Paul tells

us, in the text, that the Lord hath given him;—a power to discard the disorderly member from the communion of the faithful, so that, without sincere repentance, and public reconciliation, he shall no longer be acknowledged as a true disciple of Christ. And whosoever despised this power, which was only to be exercised in the one apostolical church, must be considered as renouncing the government and denying the authority of the Son of God.

Here the latitudinarian exclaims—“*What! so rigid an enforcement of uniformity, without any toleration, or liberty, for those who may happen to think otherwise! What is this but setting up the most horrid system of tyranny!*”

Were Christianity that undefined thing which many in the present day suppose it to be, there might be some weight in such an objection; but if we take our account of this religion from the tenor of the Gospel, all arguments of this kind must be entirely divested of their force. There we find, that the flock of Christ is to be governed as one united society; and of this society no man can be deemed a member who refuses sub-

mission to its laws and regulations. Without this, he cannot be a *Christian* : but he is not therefore deprived of his natural liberty ; he may be whatever else he pleases.

It follows, that the enforcement of uniformity *in the church*, is no more a tyranny, than the enforcement of the established laws in any other community. The power of discipline is spiritual, not temporal. In the age of the apostles, as well as in this in which we live, there was a *choice* permitted to every individual. No man is compelled to be a Christian at all. But if Christianity be his choice, it is better for him to be a Christian in reality, than in vague and licentious profession, like the Nicolaitans of old, or the disciples of Simon the sorcerer. And men cannot be real and orderly Christians, without submitting to the laws of Christ, and continuing in the unity of the apostolical church.

The Gospel informs us of no independent sects, which might receive the excommunicated person into another division of Christ's mystical body. No such division is acknowledged. When the official sentence is pronounced, the offender is separate from

the communion of Christians. He is in the state of the unconverted; and, therefore, said to be delivered to Satan—to *that spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience.*

And this sentence was pronounced, not only upon the profligate and immoral, but also upon those who corrupted or perverted the faith. Thus St. Paul exhorts Timothy, to persevere in *holding faith and a good conscience, which some having put away, concerning faith, have made shipwreck: of whom,* continues the apostle, *is Hymeneus and Alexander, whom I HAVE DELIVERED UNTO SATAN, that they may learn not to blaspheme, (1 Tim. i. 19, 20.)*

And the like severity of censure was consequent upon the perpetration of notorious crimes; as in the case of the incestuous person, in the church of Corinth: to which church the apostle writes—*In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my Spirit, with the power—or authority—of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. (1. Cor. v. 4, 5.)*

It has been supposed by some, that the phrase *destruction of the flesh*, which is here introduced, authorises the infliction of temporal punishment, and the delivering over of the offender to the secular arm ; but, as the secular power did not in that age recognise the censures of the church, and, as the apostle tells us in the text, that the Lord has given him a power *to edification, not to destruction*, I conceive that the word *flesh*, in this passage, means nothing more than *carnal affections* or evil passions ; and that the *destruction of the flesh* is the mortification of such affections and passions. St. Paul does not, therefore, recommend that a sentence of capital punishment should be executed on the person of the offender by the secular arm ; but that he should be subjected to such spiritual censure, that he could no longer proceed in this irregular practice, upon a vain presumption of his privilege, as a member of Christ's visible church.—As much as if he had said—“ *Let him be removed from our communion, out of the spiritual kingdom of our Lord, and consequently into the dominions of Satan, that a sense of his lost condition may bring him to true re-*

pentance, and promote his reformation." And this meaning of the passage is implied in the last clause—*that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord*: for the offender's dying in impenitence, or in a state of alienation from the communion of the apostles, could in no sense have conduced to his salvation.

Thus we find that the most severe censures of the church were directed to edification, and not to destruction. And when, as in the present case, they had produced their salutary effect—when the offender had brought forth fruits of sincere repentance—with what parental tenderness does the apostle receive him again into communion! *Sufficient, says he, to such a one is this punishment, which was inflicted of many: so that, contrariwise, ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest, perhaps, such a one should be swallowed up with too much sorrow: wherefore I beseech you, that ye would confirm your love towards him.* (2 Cor. ii. 6—8.)

Such was the great law of discipline. It consisted in the power of censure and absolution: its end was edification; and its

sanction, the essential unity of the visible church. It was committed by Christ himself to his apostles, and by them delivered to those ministers who lawfully and officially succeeded them in their sacred charge.

Thus St. Paul instructs Titus the bishop of the Cretians—*These things speak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority; let no man despise thee.* (Tit. ii. 15.) And again—*A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject.* (Tit. iii. 10.) By rejecting we must understand the removing of him out of the communion and fellowship of the church.

And as this law of discipline is a law of the Lord, so it has, in its motive, its nature, and its effect, an exact conformity with his providential methods of dealing with his people. Hence we may consider St. Paul as describing both the one and the other, in the epistle to the Hebrews.—*Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children—My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, neither faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If*

ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons : for what son is there whom the father chasteneth not ?—Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, which chastened us, and we gave them reverence : shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live ? For they, verily, for a few days chastened us, as it seemed meet to them ; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now, no chastening, for the present, seemeth to be joyous, but grievous : nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. (Heb. xii. 5—11.)

Though this passage, in its primary acceptance, refer to the general sufferings to which, by the providence of God, the church should be exposed, yet it takes in the true notion of the chastisement of discipline—the salutary end it is calculated to produce—and the duty of submitting to it with patience and humility. It is the paternal correction of an offending child inflicted in love ; and, however grievous for the present, designed and calculated to effect his reformation and improvement. It is a power which

the Lord has given to edification, not to destruction.

Notwithstanding, therefore, the lawful exercise of this power has sometimes been miscalled *persecution*, it is a thing, in its nature and object, totally distinct from it.

Persecution is the fruit, not of love, but of wrath and misguided zeal; its professed view is to promote the cause of religion; but it acts under the influence of the angry passions, and, therefore, aims rather at the punishment of the offender than at the removal of the offence. And this disposition can originate only in an ignorance of the true spirit of religion, both natural and revealed.

Wherefore, our Lord declares to his disciples—*They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN THE FATHER NOR ME.* (John, xvi. 2, 3.)

Such was the temper with which the apostles James and John contemplated the apostate and inhospitable Samaritans, when they said to Jesus—*Lord, wilt thou that we*

command fire to come down from heaven and consume them? (Luke, ix. 54.)

They aimed not at reformation, but punishment. And so agreeable to their irritated passions were the thoughts of revenge, that they would not commit the chastisement of their adversaries to the power and justice of Christ, though he was present amongst them, but desired to take the work into their own hands. The words are not—*Wilt thou punish?* but—*Wilt thou that we command fire?*—Wilt thou gratify us with a power, and commission, to destroy?

This was a feeling so diametrically opposite to the true Christian temper, that it merited a sharp reproof:—*Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of: for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them*—the dispensation, which I am now come to publish, is for the salvation of the obedient, and not for the temporal punishment of the disobedient. The same lesson he inculcates upon another occasion:—*If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not*—I condemn him not to present punishment:—*for I came not to*

judge the world, but to save the world.

But, lest it should be inferred from hence that the laws of the Gospel might be contemned with safety, it is immediately added—*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.* (John, xii. 47, 48.)

Whence it appears that, as there is a day appointed for the judgment of the disobedient, the ministers of Christ must refer the obstinate and contumacious to the ultimate decision of that day: they can only, agreeably to the import of the words, (*Anathema Maran atha*), *set them apart till the Lord comes.* They cannot, in the mean time, claim a power to inflict temporal punishments beyond the verge of that law of discipline, which was committed to them for the preservation of due order in the church—a power which is directed to *edification, not to destruction.*

Our Lord's precepts are enforced and explained by his practice: and upon the present subject it may be remarked, that when he cleansed the temple from those profane traffickers who were polluting that

holy place, he made him a scourge of small cords, and drove them out. (John, ii. 15.) He did not handle the sword, the spear, or the bow. The instrument which he used might produce present smart, but it could not endanger the lives of men. His design was not to destroy, but to correct.

And when he sets forth the state of his household—the church, in succeeding ages—and delineates the character of those servants who should be entrusted with its government during their Lord's absence, he thus speaks of the persecuting steward:—*If that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him off, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. xxiv. 48, &c.)*

The ruler of Christ's household was not authorised to *smite in wrath*: therefore, St. Paul, with manifest allusion to these words of our Lord, gives this instruction to Timothy

—A bishop must be blameless ; not given to wine ; no striker. (1 Tim. iii. 3.)

This is a general rule ; for it is again repeated to the apostolical bishop of the Cretians—*A bishop must be blameless, as the servant of God ; not self-willed ; not soon angry ; not given to wine ; no striker. (Tit. i. 7.)*

The steward of Christ's household, or the Christian bishop, is invested with an authority which no member of the church can safely despise ; but his authority is spiritual, as the same apostle declares :—*The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds — (2 Cor. x. 4.)* — that is, as he proceeds to explain—to the casting down of imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God. But these weapons are not to be used in the indulgence of human passion and revenge : for the apostle presently speaks of his authority as given him by the Lord, *for edification, and not for destruction.*

And the use of carnal weapons, or the exercise of a power to punish and destroy, is

order to correct errors in religion, is not conceded in a single page of the Gospel of Christ. Our Lord often instructs his disciples how to endure persecution; but I find no direction how to persecute. Whenever, therefore, persecution is mentioned, the saints are represented as merely passive. The active part of their commission goes no farther than this—*Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican; and Shake off the very dust of your feet, for a testimony against them.* (Luke, ix. 5.) It therefore stops short of the very first step of persecution.

As an indulgence of the angry passions denotes an unchristian Spirit, so it is wholly inadequate to any purpose for which the Gospel was designed. It may destroy the body, but it cannot reform the heart. For St. James has justly remarked—*The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* (James, i. 10.) Our penal laws may teach thieves to act with caution; but they have no power to render them sincerely honest: and such, likewise, is the defect of persecution. It may produce many hypo-

crites; but it can never make a real Christian.

In our age and country the thing itself is happily unknown. The trial of saints, at present, is not by the *fire of persecution*, but by the *desolating waters of indifference*. Persecution is not seen nor felt amongst us, though its name is often heard, and many are ambitious of the credit of having submitted to its stroke. During many ages, it was the part of the most approved Christians to suffer for righteousness' sake. The enduring of evil wrongfully, was the mark which distinguished a saint. It is, therefore, no matter of surprise, that the hypocrite should still be desirous of counterfeiting the mark, in order to give a currency to his own character.

Hence, it is no uncommon thing for those who would *appear righteous before men*, to boast of their sufferings, to complain of the lash of persecution, and pretend to have encountered it in the place where it was not to be found.

But few counterfeits will bear the test of accurate comparison; and this, in the pre-

sent case, will expose the spurious impression. Saints are patient under real persecution; whilst hypocrites are always ready to cry out under imaginary sufferings. Saints never covet persecution: for however indifferent they may be to their own sufferings, and however willing to suffer for Christ's sake, they know that persecution cannot be exercised without sin; and no sincere disciple of Christ can be a voluntary accessory to the sin of another. To all this the hypocrite is indifferent and insensible. His only aim is to obtain the credit of sanctity, by displaying the mark of persecution. But, even were the impression genuine, it is a subject of obvious reflection, that persecution cannot justly promote any man's religious reputation, unless he *suffer for righteousness' sake*. The thief at the bar of justice, and the seditious person in his banishment, derive no credit from persecution. Restraint on the propagation of pernicious principles, or chastisement for irregularity of conduct, and habits of insubordination, is not persecution; it is lawful correction. Instead of establishing, therefore, the reputation of sanctity, it only ex-

poses the disorderly sufferer, and adds disgrace to his just punishment. So that, upon the whole, notwithstanding a disposition to magnify common sufferings into real persecution be the most decisive feature of the hypocrite, there is nothing which, in fact, can be less serviceable to his cause. Nevertheless, we still perceive, and shall perceive, the odious name of persecution affixed to the most salutary and necessary caution against ambiguous changes and mischievous intrusion.

And as every effort in defence of our national church is branded with the name of bigotry, so the most just and temperate remark upon the disorder of separatists, and their visionary schemes, is characterised as *horrid persecution*. But our Lord was no persecutor, when he said of the ostentatious Pharisees—*These things they do, that they may be seen of men*: nor did his just reproof of their hypocrisy, and perversion of the Scripture, in the smallest degree advance their claim to the reputation of holiness.

The ministers of Christ are not, therefore, to be deterred, by this abuse of the term *persecution*, from the vindication of just

discipline, or from declaring the *reproofs* and the *threats*, as well as the *promises*, of the Gospel.

That spurious liberality which is indifferent to truth and error—that pretended candour which aims to extinguish our zeal and to blind our judgment—in vain obtrudes upon us, under the name of *Christian charity*. It is not the thing it pretends to be. It is not consistent with it; for it obstructs that greatest effort of charity—seasonable reproof, and evangelical admonition.

SERMON XI.

OF THE SIN OF SEPARATION.

1 COR. XII. 25.

That there should be no schism in the body.

IN the present age, a general sentiment seems to prevail, that Christianity allows every man *to walk after the imagination of his own heart*, and to do *what is right in his own eyes*. As a natural consequence of such a mode of thinking, every attempt to expose the folly and danger of departing from the straight rule of the Gospel is censured as *rash* and *illiberal judgment*. And, for the purpose of enforcing this censure, has often been repeated that question of the apostle—*Who art thou, that judgest another man's servant? To his own Master he standeth or falleth.*

That all rash and uncharitable judgment is expressly forbidden; and that whoever goes beyond what is written, in censuring the conduct of his brethren, and pronounces

a sentence of condemnation, by the weight of his private opinion, or a conceit of his own self-sufficiency ; is chargeable with a great offence : these are truths which no sincere and well-informed Christian can deny.

But widely different from this is that duty which is incumbent upon every faithful minister of the Gospel, to open the book of sacred records, and truly and impartially to report such cases as have been already adjudged and determined ; and also to warn every professor of Christ's religion, that the authority of this book will be recognised in the supreme court—in that great day *when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.*

In this book, then, it is plainly laid down and declared, that the church of Christ, upon earth, was established in perfect unity of *fellowship, of faith, and doctrine*, guarded by a wholesome *law of discipline*, and placed under the care and superintendence of a duly-constituted ministry, which derived its appointment and authority through Christ, from God the Father of all.

And, to those who acknowledge the New

Testament as the rule of their faith—as that code, which unfolds the foundation of their hopes, and the terms of their responsibility—I would recommend, as a subject of serious and necessary consideration, the manner in which the apostles of Christ spoke of those who should introduce *divisions* and *heresies*, prejudicial to that unity.

St. Paul thus pathetically exhorts the Corinthians to avoid the first tendency towards a diversity of judgment in the church;—*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment: for it hath been declared unto me, of you, my brethren, that there are contentions among you.*—DIVISIONS and CONTENTIONS!—How far had they proceeded; and what effect had they produced? Had they gone beyond what is deemed, in our age, the lawful exercise of private judgment?

Let us hear:—*Now this I say, that every one of you saith—I am of Paul; and I, of Apollos; and I, of Cephas; and I, of*

Christ. The ministers here mentioned, *Paul, Apollos, and Cephas*, were all duly appointed, sound teachers, equally authorised to instruct the church. It might, therefore, be thought—and were Christianity a scheme of human device, and subject to the controul of variable opinion, it might be thought *with truth*—that a predilection in favour of either of these ministers must have been the most innocent exertion of private judgment: but how does the apostle argue upon the case?—*Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you; or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?* (1 Cor. x. 12.) Which is as much as if he had said—“*It is required of Christians to hear the Gospel with simplicity and singleness of heart; not to enrol themselves under the names of their favourite teachers, and to set up the ministry of the one in opposition to that of the other.*”

For this partiality he censures as evil, and as leading to an evil still greater, the *disuniting* of the body of Christ. In another place, therefore, he expresses himself on this subject more fully and emphatically:—*I hear that there be divisions among you, and I partly believe it; for there must also be*

HERESIES among you, *that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.* (1 Cor. xi. 18, 19.)

Surely, a partiality, however undue, to the ministry of some one of those apostolical teachers who were *earnestly striving together for the uncorrupted faith of the Gospel*, was far from amounting to the crime of *heresy*. But the apostle justly regards the indulgence of this partiality as taking the first step in the road to heresy; as following the unsteady light of a separate judgment, that *abomination of desolation*, which, through the thorny path of fruitless dispute, and uncharitable contention, leads the unsteady mind, from the narrow way of salvation, into the wilderness of heresy and delusion. This was, then, one of those *offences*, or *stumbling-blocks*, of which our Lord had forewarned his disciples, declaring to them—*It is impossible but that offences will come; but woe to him through whom they come.* (Luke, xvii. 1.)

Of the pernicious tendency of such predilections we have many examples in the modern history of Christianity. Thus *Wesley* and *Whitfield* were pious ministers

of our apostolical church. By uniting in a common cause with their brethren, they might have been useful to the edification of that church. But an intemperate, though honest, zeal, led them into some irregularities in the work of their ministry. Their exertions made them popular; and that popularity produced a *sect*. Abandoning the unerring rule of the Gospel, for the guidance of private judgment, they disagreed upon certain points of doctrine. Each was followed by his party, and the *sect* was again *divided*. This wild vine, planted in the soil of self-conceit, has, in the space of four-score years, become luxuriant and spreading. How many separate branches it may have put forth, before the present day, it would be tedious to enquire. But some of them exhibit a total alienation from the parent church; and there are those amongst its cultivators who avow the design of overshadowing its growth and supplanting it altogether.

Against those who proceed thus far in the road to heresy, and cause actual separation from the mystical body, the same apostle warns the elders of the church:—*Take heed*

to yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers—bath visibly invested you with the sacred charge—to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know that, after my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, OF YOURSELVES SHALL MEN ARISE, speaking perverse things, TO DRAW AWAY DISCIPLES AFTER THEM. (Acts, xx. 30.)

And, as the disciples of these perverse teachers are drawn away after them, and therefore separated from the unity of the church; so, on the other hand, the discipline of the church would not admit of fellowship with them. For it is an apostolical injunction—Mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have received, and avoid them. (Rom. xvi. 17.)

And to the church of the Thessalonians this charge is given:—We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition that ye received of

us; for yourselves know how ye ought to follow us. And again:—If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. (2 Thess. iii. 6, 7—14.)

From these last words it appears, that in the days of the apostle insubordination had not proceeded to that height of effrontery as to exult in the number of its votaries. A removal from the fellowship of the church was matter of *shame*, even to the disorderly and contumacious.

In the apostolical writings, no subject occurs more frequently than the reproof of those self-constituted teachers, who introduce schism and disorder into the flock of Christ. Thus, as the term *apostle* implies one, who is duly authorised to carry the mandates and execute the commission of his superior, so St. Paul characterises those irregular teachers (who, without such authority, intruded into the ministry by the name of *false apostles*, or men falsely pretending to a divine commission. Some of these had sought occasion to blame the regular ministers of Christ, alledging particularly against them, that they taught

the Gospel for gain, and urging, as a specious contrast, the disinterestedness of their own labours. Now, though it was a Christian maxim, that *those who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel*; yet, from receiving that support to which the ministry had a lawful title St. Paul resolutely abstains, declaring—*What I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion, that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. For such are FALSE APOSTLES, DECEITFUL WORKERS, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ—taking upon themselves the office of self-constituted teachers.—And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing, if HIS MINISTERS also be transformed, as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds.* (2 Cor. xi. 12—15.)

Here it is to be observed, that these *false teachers* and importers of schism appear externally as real ministers of the Gospel, only they want an authentic appointment; and, instead of being lawfully invested with their office, they only *transform themselves into*

the apostles of Christ ; and, however their voice may sound like preachers of righteousness, whilst they come with this spurious commission, St. Paul hesitates not in styling them *ministers of Satan*. Abating their presumption and self-sufficiency, these men may have had upright intentions ; but they introduced such disorder and division, as must eventually promote the cause of the great adversary.

Nor were such characters to be confined to the times in which the gospel was first propagated. For the same apostle, speaking of the *latter days* of Christianity, prophetically declares—*The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine ; but after their own lusts—or vain conceits—shall they HEAR to themselves teachers, having itching ears : and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.* (2 Tim. iv.) Can a question remain in our days, whether this was a true prediction or not ; whether it has been fulfilled ; or where such teachers and their disciples are to be found amongst the nominal professors of religion ?

In the same manner the other apostles

speak of those who should depart from the purity of the faith, and the unity of the church of Christ.

Thus St. Peter:—*But there were false prophets among the people—of Israel—even as there shall be FALSE TEACHERS AMONG YOU, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that brought them.* (2 Pet. ii. 1.)

Amongst professors of Christianity this must surely be deemed a most extraordinary heresy! But it was requisite that the apostolical prediction should be fulfilled: and St. Peter is found to have been a true prophet. Our own times furnish examples of men who name themselves after the name of Christ; yet disallow the Gospel account of our Lord's person and character, and deny the atonement which he made for the sins of mankind.

St. John says of the *antichristian teachers*, who were to characterise the last time—*They went out from us—they separated themselves from the apostolical church—but they were not of us*—previous to their going out, they were not real and true, but only nominal members of the church—for

if they had been of us, they would, no doubt, have continued with us : but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us, (1 John, ii. 19.)

And, again, he forbids the church to countenance any teachers who should corrupt the doctrines of the Gospel :—*If there come any unto you, and bring not THIS DOCTRINE, receive him not into your houses, neither bid him, " God speed." (2 John, 10.)*

Of those murmurers and complainers, who should introduce schism and disorder in the latter ages of Christianity, St. Jude thus reminds the members of the church :—*But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.—These be they who separate themselves ; sensual, having not the spirit. (Jude, 17—19.)*

Of the teachers of these disorderly separatists, the apostle says :—*Woe unto them ! for they have gone in the way of Cain—they have, first of all, envied, and then devised evil against their brethren—and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward—*

multiplied their unhallowed altars, and wandered from place to place, to hear *what the Lord will say to them there*, whilst they watch an opportunity to overthrow his church—and have perished in the gainsaying of Corè. (V. 11.)

But how can the example of Corè apply, as the apostle expressly does apply it, to those professed teachers of the Gospel who separate themselves from the apostolical church?

In order to answer this question, let us consider the crime of this man, and its punishment. Corè and his company murmured against that ministry which God had authorised by a visible and special appointment; they accused this ministry of priestcraft and corruption, and thus excited a schism in the church of Israel:—*They gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them—Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation of the Lord are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore, then, lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord? Upon this plea of general sanctity and private in-*

spiration, they began to assume to themselves the office of the priesthood, and took up their censers to offer incense.

Such was their crime: but though multitudes esteemed them in a peculiar manner as *the people of the Lord*, there was wrath upon them, and they perished from among the congregation. Their act, like the united efforts of our present sectaries, had an external shew of *resisting the undue influence of the established ministry*, of *promoting the cause of religious freedom*, and *advancing the glory of God*; but it was an *act of rebellion against the divine decrees*; it was a *direct violation of sacred and constituted order*; it was an impious presumption, to espouse the cause of God in opposition to the authority of his declared laws; and, therefore, it was visited with the penalty of disobedience. The decrees of God are not yet cancelled: for the apostle views the conduct of those self-constituted ministers of the Gospel—those *murmurers* and *complainers* who should appear in the last time—those that *separate themselves* from the one evangelical church—as exactly parallel with the gainsaying of Coré. He

also declares, that a similar punishment awaits them. This will come to pass, perhaps, in the present world ; if not, most assuredly in that which is to come ; for *the Scripture cannot be broken.*

Such is the manner in which the apostles of Christ speak of those who introduce disorder, and divisions, and heresies, prejudicial to the unity and harmony of the church. In handling this weighty subject, upon the present and upon former occasions, I have, as much as possible, confined myself to the express declarations of those apostles, and to such reflections as necessarily arise from them. For it is not any opinion of my own, or of fallible men like myself, that I strive to enforce. It is the unerring and unequivocal sentence of that Gospel which we all receive as the rule of our faith, and as the law by which we expect to be judged in the great day. And here we need not have recourse to a few texts of doubtful meaning, or difficult interpretation. The declarations of the apostles and evangelists upon this subject are plain, frequent, and consistent. They pervade the whole of their writings. And coming from the mouth of

the Son of God, and from the suggestions of his Holy Spirit, they claim a place in our hearts paramount to all predilections of party, all prejudices of education, and all deductions of hypothetical reasoning; for if we build our hopes upon what is revealed from heaven, we must receive it as it is revealed. It is not the part of human wisdom to instruct the Holy Spirit of God. That Spirit has declared, that the separation of professed Christians from the one apostolical church is a grievous sin—is an act of perverse disobedience to the laws of the Gospel. And it must, therefore, be obvious to every reflecting man, that such separation for causes merely trivial and circumstantial, not having the plea of necessity in its favour, has less hope of being pardoned in consideration of human infirmity.

Far be it, however, from me to determine to what degree God will punish this daring and mischievous sin; or to what extent the divine goodness will have compassion on the weakness, the errors, and the perverseness of men. It is not my province to judge; but it is my duty to declare to all men, that the words which our Lord and

his apostles have spoken, will judge them in the last day—that the promises of the Gospel are exclusively directed to the *faithful*, the *obedient*, and the *charitable members of one undivided church*; and that those professors who lightly separate themselves from this church, and yet hope for salvation, must hope without promise and without Scripture.

That the divine laws are founded in right reason is a most certain truth, though we are not always competent to judge of their reasonableness. But of the fitness of that law which enjoins the unity of the apostolical church we may form an accurate idea, if we only consider the pernicious effects which needless separation, and a persuasion of its lawfulness, produce upon society in general.

In the first place, it gives the conceited, the self-willed, and insubordinate, an opportunity of framing trivial and imaginary objections to the faith, the forms, and the discipline of the church; and thus of breaking asunder the universal bond of charity, under the illusive pretence of *tender conscience*.

When this principle, spurious and fantastical as we generally find it, is allowed to operate freely, it unhinges every sacred obligation, and reduces the beautiful fabric of Christianity to a heap of rubbish and confusion. What is essential in religion must no longer be enforced according to the rule of God's word, and the model of the primitive church: what is circumstantial and indifferent must not be fixed by lawful authority, adjusted by the rules of good order, and directed to general edification. All must submit to the fancy of the individual; to the effrontery of self-conceit, under the assumed name of *tender conscience*. And as men, when they make their separate notions and surmises the rule of judging, must be variously determined in their opinions, it is evident that, under the influence of this vague mode of thinking, neither unity nor uniformity can prevail.

A very little acquaintance with the present state of religion may convince any man, that a great variety of sects and denominations, and amongst them abundance of opposition, detraction, bitterness, and unchristian censure, not to mention danger

ous and pernicious errors, have sprung from this source, to the prejudice of that charitable and benevolent spirit which is essential to the disciples of Christ. For the conscience which is *unduly tender* on the side of its possessor, is generally found rough and callous when it comes into contact with his neighbour.

Again : the bulk of mankind, who seldom think deeply, observing such divisions and dissensions amongst nominal professors of Christianity, are led to imagine that so many sects of the same religion are, in reality, so many distinct religions ; and that, as the members of each of these sects are equally tolerated and protected in society, one religion must be as good as another ; that they all conduct their votaries to the same place ; and, consequently, that it is perfectly immaterial to which of them they attach themselves, or how long they deliberate before they have determined in their choice.

Hence the progress is easy to a secret surmise, that, if all religions are equal amongst themselves, an adherence to the form of either of them cannot be matter of

any great moment ; that, as the right of private judgment operates so freely, a man may shape his religion agreeably to his own ideas, as well as in conformity with the opinions and practice of any body of men ; that if he only take heed to support in the world a decent deportment, and *serve God in his own way*, he shall be perfectly safe, however singular in his system of devotion.

But, to *his own way* he naturally adds *at his own leisure*. The great work is continually put off to a more convenient season, and the convenient season never comes. This is, indeed, an indulgence beyond the permission of our laws. The act of toleration has not conceded, even to *tender consciences*, the *infidel liberty* of contemning every form of devotion ; but as the lapse of error is rapid upon the declivity of private judgment, this liberty has been claimed upon principle in its fullest extent. One of the most eminent separatists of our age having laid it down as a maxim, *that the state has no right to enquire what religion he chooses to profess*, confidently adds—*Or whether I choose to have any religion at all.* And it is notorious that, in compliance

with the assumption of private judgment, that law of the state which enjoins regular attendance at some place of public worship, is seldom, or never, enforced.

It is, then, evident, that the laxity of sentiment which countenances unlimited separation, dissolves all the powers of wholesome discipline. Even personal admonition may be rejected with pride and sullenness, upon a presumption of civil impunity, or of religious liberty : for whilst a general opinion of the lawfulness of separation prevails, every man regards his union with the national church, or with any other body of professors, as matter of choice, and that choice as a thing in itself wholly indifferent.

Hence, if a member of the established church is reprov'd for any irregularity of conduct, or if he encounter the slightest inconvenience or want of accommodation, he withdraws from the society of his brethren, and joins some separate sect ; if he cannot submit to the rules of this order, he goes to another ; and if his notions and conduct cannot be duly accommodated in any sect, already formed, there is an ob-

vious expedient, to found a new sect of his own, or to subside in the solitary meditation of a *quietist*. And all this while he continues to avow the profession of Christianity, and even retains the hope of salvation through Christ.

Such disorders are produced amongst those who have some remaining sense of moral responsibility, and some regard to their condition in a future state. But these are not the only evils consequent upon an unbridled laxity of principle and discipline. To this laxity we must, in a great measure, ascribe the profane licentiousness of thousands in our land, who live without hope and without God in the world. To this we must ascribe the pernicious vices and horrid crimes by which they are disgraced in this world, and the misery they are doomed to suffer in the world to come. A mistaken candour, a spurious liberality, have set them at liberty from all salutary controul in the period of their youth. Because the opinions and the conduct of men are free, the church could not effectually claim them as her children, and subject them to a religious education. It was not the choice of their parents to bring

them regularly into the assembly of the faithful, and their choice could not be compelled. Irreligion is the patrimony of the family; and the general abuse which has grown out of the lenient spirit of toleration, leaves the children in quiet possession of their inheritance. They have no invariable rule of faith impressed upon their infant minds, no sacred laws which demand obedience, no discipline which may restrain the conduct of men under religious sanctions. In all these particulars, toleration admits of diversity and dispensation; and custom, which perverts the spirit of toleration, connives at their total dereliction.

Thus multitudes grow up in ignorance and profaneness. Beholding religion only at a distance, and remarking the discord and vanity of its nominal professors, they rashly conclude that religion itself is nothing more than a solemn delusion or weak affectation, and treat it with absolute neglect.

Thus the tolerant laws of our land, which, if properly understood, go no farther than to renounce persecution—to suspend temporal penalties, without abrogating or altering the decrees of the Gospel—are made in the

opinion of the multitude, the great rule of faith and practice. That multitude seldom reflects that no man can be admitted into heaven by the operation of human laws; and, in consequence of this woeful inattention, the Holy Scriptures, which, alone, are sufficient for salvation, are either overlooked or perverted—those Scriptures which teach us that the church of Christ is *one undivided body*, and enjoin that *there should be no schism in that body, but that all the members should have the same care one for another.*

SERMON XII.

OF CERTAIN PLEAS WHICH HAVE BEEN
URGED, IN DEFENCE OF SEPARATION.

2 PETER II. 19.

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption.

THAT there are men who prevail upon weak and unstable Christians to condemn those laws of order and decency which our Lord himself and his apostles have laid down for the government and edification of the church, is a subject of daily but melancholy observation. And it is no less so, that they pervert the plainest principles of the Gospel, for the purpose of justifying their own irregular conduct.

Thus, the indulgence which the apostles concede to the scruples of a *tender conscience*, and the doctrine of *Christian liberty* which they maintain, have been perversely urged, as authorising a deviation from the common faith, a contempt of the censure of

discipline, and an absolute separation from the apostolical church.

Now, it may be presupposed, that neither the allowance to which the scruples of conscience have an evangelical claim, nor the true principle of Christian liberty, can even countenance any of these disorders. They cannot be regarded as equivalent to *self-will* and *insubordination*: for the apostles repeatedly, and most impressively, inculcate the duty of receiving one invariable faith, and submitting to the laws of order in the unity of the church. And the apostles are *consistent teachers*: they do not in one place enjoin a thing as absolutely necessary; and in another place leave the same thing to individual choice, as matter of total indifference. But, let us enquire—

As to the claims of a tender conscience; we may remark, in the first place, that our Saviour forbids, under severe penalties, the *offending of one of those little ones that believe in him*. Here the word which we translate *offend*, properly signifies, to put an obstruction or *snare* in the way, so that the traveller is reduced to the necessity of either stumbling upon it, or turning aside out of

the road, in order to avoid the danger. Wherefore it is evident that the threat of our Lord applies to those who obstruct the direct path in which his disciples are commanded to proceed. Be it further remarked, that the believers here spoken of (are characterised by the *humility, simplicity, and innocence*, of little children; not by the *sickleness, caprice, and perverse humours*, which too often disgrace a tender age. And those who receive the Gospel with the humility and simplicity of little children, receive it as it has been delivered, and as it is taught by the authorised ministers of Christ. They are consequently to be found in unity with his church, and are there to be treated with gentleness and forbearance; not to be perplexed with curious and doubtful questions, those *stumbling-blocks which compose the fabric of many of our conventicles*; but instructed with meekness in the fundamental principles of religion, till their minds be enlarged, and their faith confirmed and established.

And such alone are intended by these *little ones*. For those *babes in Christ*, who manifest rather the perverseness than the

humility of children ; who encourage *envyings, strife, and divisions* ; are accused by St. Paul of carnal-mindedness, and sharply corrected with the rod of censure. (1 Cori. iii. 1, &c.

It is not, then, every constitutional weakness, and wayward perversity of temper, in which petulant or unsteady professors may choose to indulge themselves, that Christian ministers are authorised to connive at, under the name of a *tender conscience*.

That the rights of conscience are recognised in the New Testament, is an undoubted truth ; and St. Paul, in particular, impresses the duty of making allowance for the scruples of weak Christians. But this allowance has its proper place, and its just limitation. It is to be exercised, not in favour of schism and heresy, but in the unity of the apostolical church, and towards those members whose faith is pure, whose obedience to the laws of Christ is sincere and uniform, and who have preserved unbroken the great bond of charity. And it is limited to things merely circumstantial and indifferent ; things of so little importance, as not to have been determined by a divine revela-

tion. It is not extended to the contempt of any positive ordinance of God, or lawful authority of man. No such allowance is made to those who resist the laws of good order, despise government, or set up their own opinions against the express declarations of the Gospel.

Thus, when St. Paul commands the church, *Let every soul be subject to the higher powers*—he gives the reason why all its members should persevere in this subjection—*for there is no power, but of God: the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.* And to this it is added—*Wherefore YE MUST NEEDS BE SUBJECT, not only for wrath—for fear of punishment—but also FOR CONSCIENCE SAKE.* (Rom. xiii. 1, &c.)

Here is a just limitation of the rights of a Christian's conscience. Here we are taught, that in things expressly ordained and declared by the Gospel, it has no liberty to hesitate: its duty is, to submit and obey.

The same duty of submission to human authority, in things lawful, is inculcated by St. Peter:—*Servants, be subject to your ma-*

sters with all fear : not only to the good, and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man, FOR CONSCIENCE TOWARD GOD, endure grief, suffering wrongfully. (1 Pet. ii. 9.)

Here the conscience of Christians is restrained within the bounds of order and discipline ; and when it overleaps these limits, it becomes an *evil conscience*. Its *tenderness* is no longer acknowledged.

Wherefore, St. Paul says of those who, in the latter days, *should depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, that they have THEIR CONSCIENCE SEARED WITH A HOT IRON. (1 Tim. iv. 1, 2.)* And again:—*There are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not : wherefore, rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.* Perhaps these men teach according to the dictates of their conscience ; no doubt they pretend as much : their pampered vanity may have furnished them with many scruples against the word of truth, and the laws of good order ; and these they may call *scruples of conscience*. But

such scruples are not respected by the Gospel; for, as the apostle proceeds, *unto them that are defiled and unbelieving*—that is, who disallow the true evangelical faith, for they do profess and teach a faith of their own—*unto them is nothing pure; but even THEIR MIND AND CONSCIENCE IS DEFILED. They profess that they know God, but in works deny him, being abominable and DISOBEDIENT, and unto every good work, reprobate.* (Tit. i.)

Thus we see, that St. Paul makes no allowance for any scruples of conscience, in those *disorderly, presumptuous, and disobedient teachers*, who, either in matter of faith or of discipline, offend against the unity and harmony of the church.

In what, then, consists that allowance which the apostle does really make, for the consciences of weak Christians; and which is, therefore, to be admitted as a rule, by the ministers of the Gospel?

In order to discover this, we need no more than to consult the fourteenth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, and the eighth and tenth chapters of the first epistle to the Corinthians, where St. Paul treats at large of

this subject. In the first of these chapters, he thus begins his exhortation to the church :—*Him that is weak in the faith, receive ye ; but not to doubtful disputations.*—RECEIVE YE ! How were the brethren to receive him ? Certainly, into the unity of the visible church of Christ. He could not be received by the members of that church, as a *separatist from their communion*. And—*receive him ; but not to DOUBTFUL disputations*—perplex him not with questions which are of such trivial moment, as not to have been resolved and determined by any express declaration of the Gospel, or definite rule of good order.

Of the general nature of such *unnecessary* questions, we may judge, by the instances adduced throughout this chapter. And these refer only to the ritual distinction between clean and unclean meats, and the observance of days, which had been set apart by the Levitical law. An attention to such things was no longer required ; as the ceremonial ordinances of the law of Moses were now superseded by the Gospel dispensation. But the late converts from Judaism could not neglect them with a safe conscience, as they were the known or

dinances of God, to which they had been accustomed to pay respect. And in these their innocent scruples, which offended neither against the faith, the unity, nor the good order of the church, the apostle directs that these converts should be indulged, without prejudice to their Christian profession. To that sentence—*Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin*—there are some who would give a greater latitude of meaning; but he who wants *faith* to preserve him in the unity of the apostolical church, must want *the faith of a Christian*.

In the other chapters which I have mentioned, the allowance which is to be made to the scruples of a tender conscience, is exemplified in the eating of things which have been offered in sacrifice to idols. In that age of general idolatry, this must have been a very common case. The apostle informs us, that *he that was strong in the faith, knowing that an idol is nothing in the world; that there is none other God but one; and that the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; felt a liberty in his own mind to partake of all meats alike, asking no questions for conscience sake. But there*

were others, who, perhaps more justly, regarded that meat as an abomination, which had been offered in sacrifice to idols. And those who felt no such scruple in their own breast, are commanded, not only to respect the feelings of these more timid Christians, but also to abstain from using such things themselves, lest they should offend the conscience of their weaker brethren. And in this sense the apostle says—*All things are lawful for me ; but all things are not expedient : all things are lawful for me ; but all things edify not.* And he has laid it down as a general rule, *that all things must be done to edification.*

Thus it appears, that the indulgence which the apostle grants to the scruples of a tender conscience has its due place in the assembly of the faithful, and its just limits in things merely circumstantial and indifferent. It does not extend to the division of the visible church. It affords no justification to latitude in the profession of the faith—no licence to remove the least of its fundamental principles—no plea for the contempt of just discipline. So far is it from authorising the most remote tendency to schism and se-

paration, that it has a direction diametrically opposite to them. Its use and design are, *to preserve the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace.*

But is this the case, likewise, with respect to the other great plea of which our separatists would avail themselves, when they urge the principle of *Christian liberty*?

The Gospel is, indeed, announced to us as a *perfect law of liberty*; but this liberty, upon enquiry, will be found to consist in a freedom from the dominion of sin, and from the yoke of the ceremonial law of Moses. Thus, when our Lord says to the believing Jews—*Ye shall know the truth: and the truth shall make you free*; (John, viii. 32.) it is evident, from the context, that he means —“ *the knowledge of the Gospel shall make you free from the dominion of sin, by which ye were held in bondage under the operation of the ritual law.*” And so it is explained by St. Paul:—*For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.—Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.* (Rom. vi. 14—18.) And, in another place—*The law of the spirit of life, in*

Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death. (Rom. viii. 2.) And, in the same chapter, he speaks of *the glorious liberty of the children of God, as a deliverance, not from the rule of faith, or the laws of discipline, but from the bondage of corruption. (V. 21.)*

The word *liberty*, as applied to the members of the church, is variously used by the apostles. In the chapters I have considered above, with reference to a tender conscience, liberty means the persuasion of a man's own mind with regard to the lawfulness of things indifferent. But this liberty is not to be abused, to the offence of weaker brethren. *Take heed, saith the apostle, that this liberty of yours become not a stumbling-block to them that are weak. (1 Cor. viii. 9.)*

And again—*Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other : for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience ? (1 Cor. x. 29.)*

Here Christians are restrained, in deference to the conscience of others, from the use of certain things which their own conscience allows.

In the second epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul declares that—*Where the spirit of*

the Lord is, there is liberty. (2 Cor. iii. 17.) But we find that the operation of this liberty is not to dissolve the unity of the church, or to abrogate the authority of its ministers ; but *to remove the veil which had concealed the Mosaic ordinances.*

The Galatians are frequently reminded of their Christian liberty, which, in the epistle addressed to their churches, constantly means *a freedom from the right of circumcision and the ordinances of the Levitical law.* And the apostle dwells the more on this subject, because of certain *false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily, to spy out the liberty which they had in Christ Jesus, that they might bring them into bondage.* (Gal. ii. 4.) And these false brethren had succeeded so far, as to persuade the Galatians, that an observance of these rites was necessary to their salvation. This was a dangerous error, which threatened to destroy the very foundation of their Christianity. And, in order to remove it, the apostle gives this charge—*Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty where-with Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*

(Gal. v. 1.) What yoke does he mean? Not that of ecclesiastical discipline, but that of *circumcision*, and the ritual law. For thus it immediately follows—*Behold I, Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.* And, again, he reminds them—*Brethren, ye have been called into liberty*—that is, into freedom from the law of circumcision—*only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh; but by love serve one another.*

In all this, there is not the least ground to surmise that Christian liberty implies a permission to depart from the unity of the church, or a right to condemn its faith and government, and to resist its discipline. And to guard against any mistake of this kind—to obviate the perverse interpretation of every seducer—the apostle enumerates amongst those works of the flesh, which are here forbidden, *variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, and heresies*; these are not things indifferent. They do not come within the lawful verge of a *tender conscience*, or of *Christian liberty*: for it is categorically declared, that **THEY WHO DO SUCH THINGS,**

SHALL NOT ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

St. James recognises the *perfect law of liberty*. (Chap. i. 25—ii. 12.) But this law requires obedience to sacred ordinances: and it gives no credit to a profession of faith, unaccompanied with works of righteousness.

St. Peter also has some remarks upon this subject. According to his declaration and precept—*It is the will of God, that, with well-doing, ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. AS FREE, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men: love the brotherhood: fear God: honour the king.* (1 Peter, ii. 16, 17.)

This is not a liberty which indulges in frivolous cavil against the law of discipline, contemns just authority, and sanctions division. For, throughout the whole of this paragraph, the apostle enforces the indispensable duty of submission to government and good discipline, whether spiritual or temporal: and the *brotherhood*, whom we are here commanded to love, are those who live in union with the visible church of Christ.

Thus the great principle of Christian liberty is not once extended, throughout the apostolical writings, as a licence to alter the faith, to dissolve the unity of the church, or to set aside its government and discipline.

It is true; the same apostle, whose words I have last quoted, takes notice of *that kind of liberty* for which many professors in our age are strenuously disposed to contend: but how far he authorises the use of it we may judge from his own expressions.

The subject is thus introduced:—*There shall be false teachers among you, who, privily, shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them.—And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.—But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness; and DESPISE GOVERNMENT: PRESUMPTUOUS ARE THEY, SELF-WILLED, they are not AFRAID TO SPEAK EVIL OF DIGNITIES.* These false teachers allure their disciples, under the pretence of introducing them into Christian liberty: but, as the apostle proceeds—*whila they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption.* (2. Pet.

ii.) I need not add, that theirs is not an example for imitation.

And as to the justice of the apostle's censure, how could these seducers give a more decisive proof of their slavery to corruption, than by perverting the plain declarations of the Gospel, for the promotion of a design which the Gospel unequivocally forbids— for the purpose of justifying the devices of disorderly men, and seducing the ignorant and unwary from the fold of Christ, into the crooked paths of error and delusion?

But I trust, brethren, ye have not so learned Christ.—If so be, ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Christ Jesus. (1 Peter, ii. 2-5.)

I might here remark some particular portions of scripture, upon which our separatists have laid great stress as favourable to their cause. Of these, there are several, as they have been ambitiously sought for, artfully interpreted, and claimed for a long time.

without contradiction. Let it, however, suffice to produce two of them; in the former of which, it has been presumed that separation is expressly authorised; and in the latter, that the spiritual presence of Christ is promised in the Gospel to the members of private conventicles.

The evangelist records, that one of our Lord's disciples said unto him, *Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us, is on our part.* (Mark, ix. 38—40.)

This passage, it has been urged, forbids the restraining of those who teach the Gospel out of the communion of the established church; and, consequently, authorises the act of separation.

But, if we consider, in the first place, the time when our Lord spoke these words, we shall perceive, that it was before his apostles had received their commission, for the government of the church. And, as no law can be transgressed before it is promulgated,

this man's act could not have been an offence against the terms of that commission, or a violation of the constituted rules of good order.

And, as he had not transgressed any declared law, so neither does it appear that he attempted to introduce any innovation in doctrine or discipline. He is only charged with the supposed offence, of not following Christ and his apostles in their travels, when, in fact, he had received no command to follow them.

He was well affected to the cause of Christ and of his apostles, as it evidently appears from the words which our Lord has added — *He that is not against us, is on our part.* He was a true disciple: for the power of the Lord, which visibly attended him and enabled him to work miracles, gave to his mission a credential from heaven. And this mission extended only to the performance of an extraordinary act. It did not include the general office and duties of the ministry: for the apostles themselves had not, as yet, been invested with this office.

So that, upon the whole, however this passage may discountenance the unchristian,

spirit of envy and persecution, it gives not a shadow of support to those who, taking upon themselves the office of ministers, promote divisions in the flock of Christ: for our Lord has also declared—*He that is not with me, is against me; and he that GATHERETH not with me, SCATTERETH ABROAD.* (Matt. xii. 30.)

The other passage, in which it has been presumed that the spiritual presence of Christ is promised to the members of separate conventicles, runs thus:—*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I, in the midst of them.* (Matt. xviii. 20.)

But such an application of these words could have arisen only from a practice which men too frequently indulge, to the perversion of the Gospel, and the hazard of their own immortal souls: I mean, the taking of a single sentence out of its connection, and, for the purpose of supporting their own prepossessions, giving a general extent to that declaration, which the scripture has limited to its particular and appropriate subject. For if, in the case before us, we consider the intent and design of the whole paragraph, we shall perceive that our Lord,

in the first place, gives directions how to treat a member of his church who shall have trespassed against his brother. If he can be reclaimed by private admonition, it is well; if not, the matter is to be discussed before two or three witnesses; and if this fail of effect, it is finally to be laid before the church. But if the offender neglect to hear the church, he is thenceforth to be accounted as a heathen man, or a publican; that is, he is to be removed from the communion of the faithful. Here, the unity of the church is clearly implied; for, without this, such a law of discipline could neither be sanctioned nor enforced. Accordingly, our Lord immediately proceeds to give his apostles authority to excommunicate and absolve, in all necessary cases, for the preservation of good order in this one undivided church. *Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.* *Again, I say unto you, that is not to the multitude at large, but to the apostles, the appointed stewards of his church. I say unto you, that if thou or thou shalt agree on earth as touching*

any thing that ye shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. Then immediately follows—*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I, in the midst of them.* And these words conclude the paragraph.

Thus we see, that our Lord does not here address himself to the people at large, but to his apostles in particular; and this at the very time when he gives them instructions, for the due and orderly government of his church—when the essential unity of this church is inculcated, and the awful sanction of its discipline declared and ratified. But, by the implicit tenor of the apostolical commission, the same promise of our Lord's spiritual presence extends from them to the duly constituted ministers of the visible church—to those who should believe in Christ, *through their word*—to those *disciples whom they should make in all nations.* But these disciples were not only to be baptised in the true faith, but also to observe *all things, whatsoever our Lord commanded his apostles*, and therefore, to continue in the unity of the apostolical church. And to this church, and its faithful members, the

promise of Christ's spiritual presence properly and exclusively applies.

That it cannot be extended without limitation to every nominal professor, must be evident to every man who reads the Gospel with singleness of heart. For our Lord himself says—*Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ—I have obtained an unction, or a special call of the Spirit—and shall deceive many.* Matt. xxiv. 5.) With these *deceivers* he does not promise to be spiritually present, notwithstanding they assemble in his name.

Again:—Many will say unto him in the last day, *Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name have done many wonderful works?*

These persons not only assemble and teach in the name of Christ, but, during this life, they boldly confide that their ministry is acceptable in his sight; and they persist in retaining this confidence to the day of judgment. In that day, however, we find they will be woefully convinced that *Christ was not in the midst of them.* For he will profess unto them—I NEVER KNEW YOU

—I never acknowledged you as my ministers, or appointed you to teach in my name
 —*depart from me, ye that work iniquity!*
 —ye that transgress the law of order which I established in my church.

This dreadful sentence, it is fully evident, does not apply to those servants who have abused the talents *committed to their charge*. The men, we see, are treated as absolute *strangers*, who, notwithstanding they profess to have preached the Gospel, had never been appointed or acknowledged as ministers in the church of Christ. Again:—*The seven sons of Sceva, and other vagabond Jews*, assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus, and even pretended to work miracles in his name; but the evil spirit leaped upon them and overcame them, and they found, to their cost, that Christ was not in the midst of them.

This promise, then, of the spiritual presence of Christ, is, like the other promises of the Gospel, to be understood with due limitation, and referred to those who, in the profession of the true faith, in the practice of unfeigned obedience, and in union with

the apostolical church, are gathered together in his name.

It is in vain to look further for either authority or countenance to an act of separation from that church. There is no such thing to be found. Separation is expressly forbidden in the word of God; and that word does not *say* and *unsay*;—it is not *yea* and *nay*, but *yea* and *amen*!

It therefore behoves every man who contemns this great law of order—who offends against the unity of the church—however truly he may teach the general truth of the Gospel—however fervent his feelings, or sincere his devotion—to reflect with seriousness and awe, that the most specious form of godliness, will never compensate for his perversance in a system of disobedience. For the Scripture declares, that they who support this conduct, *while they promise liberty to their disciples, are themselves the slaves of corruption.*

SERMON XIII.

REFORMATION TO BE EFFECTED WITH-
OUT PREJUDICE TO THE UNITY OF THE
CHURCH.

REV. II. 5.

*Remember, therefore, from whence thou art
fallen, and repent, and do the first
works; or else I will come unto thee
quickly, and will remove thy candlestick
out of his place, except thou repent.*

By those who set at nought the great prin-
ciple of union in the church of Christ, and
occasion schisms and contentions amongst
his disciples, various pleas have been urged
in justification of their favourite schemes.

With this view we have been often asked,
Where is a true apostolical church now to
be found upon earth? And as to the church
of England, some have reproached it with
holding many things in common with the
dogmatical church of Rome; whilst others
represent it only as a branch cut off from that
church, and maintain that the separation,

which we censure in others, is authorised by the conduct of our own reformers.

That we may be enabled to appreciate the validity of all such objections, and stem their force, it will be expedient to advert to the constitution of the apostolical church; to consider the power which its local branches possessed, to reform error and abuse, without dissolving the unity of the body; and then to examine the case of our national establishment.

That the apostolical constitution of the church was the proper model for the imitation of succeeding ages, is a proposition which few sincere Christians will be disposed to deny or controvert. Still, however, it must be granted, that, though the church was established by the apostles in purity of faith, in a uniform course of obedience to the laws of Christ, and in the most harmonious order, it was yet liable to a depression far below the perfection of this standard. As those ministers who, officially succeeded the apostles in the government of the church were not visibly supported by that extraordinary endowment of the Holy Spirit, which would have infallibly guided them

into all truth, and guarded them from error and corruption; it was possible for them to depart from that perfect rule which was set before them—from the plan already laid down in the Christian Scriptures, and to which they were now referred; and thus to disfigure the beauty of the sacred edifice. And history too plainly demonstrates, that these ministers had their *treasure in earthen vessels*; and that human infirmity introduced many pernicious errors and gross abuses.

At the same time, it must be maintained, that every degree of abuse or corruption does not immediately affect the very existence of the church, and destroy its constitution. For we often hear the apostles reproofing abuses, in those congregations which they had formed, and which they still acknowledge as branches of the true church of Christ.

It is, therefore, matter of importance to enquire, how such abuses, in the local churches of succeeding ages, are to be rectified—whether this is to be done by utterly dissolving the constitution of that church in which they are detected, and setting up another in its place, upon a plan perfectly

new and independent; or, by internal reformation—by restoring the same church to its pristine state—to the perfection of the apostolical model, without destroying the unity and identity of the body.

(1) In this enquiry the writings of the apostles will afford us some salutary direction; to which it is the duty of every Christian to attend with seriousness and respect.

In the days of St. Paul, the church of Corinth, though it had not departed from the pure faith of the Gospel, had yet grievously offended in several material instances of practice; and many of its members had notoriously transgressed the laws of decency and good order. But the apostle does not regard this church as virtually dissolved, as having ceased to exist, in consequence of such abuses. He does not proceed to lay this structure level with the ground, and to erect out of its ruins a new church, or several independent churches, better accommodated to the various tempers and views of his Corinthian converts. On the contrary, he insists upon the continuance of a perfect union in the same constituted society, representing the church

of Christ, which still included these reprehensible members, as one individual body, in which there must be neither separation nor schism.

Similar to this was the case of the churches of Galatia. They had not renounced the great articles of the Christian faith; but they had superadded to this faith some notions which were highly reprehensible, and even dangerous, inasmuch that the apostle acknowledges that *he stands in doubt of them*. Particularly, they maintained the necessity of submitting to the rite of circumcision, and of observing the ceremonial law of Moses—things which were now wholly superseded by the dispensation of the Gospel; and thus they were relinquishing their Christian liberty, and bringing the church into bondage.

St. Paul severely rebukes them for their errors; but still he addresses the Galatians as *brethren*—as members of the true apostolical church; and labours to reform abuses, without destroying the unity of the body.

In the Revelation of St. John, we have also some direction eminently pertinent to this subject. The churches in Asia Minor

are here represented under the figure of seven golden candlesticks. Most of these churches had either offended in point of practice, and had fallen into some disorder; or else had admitted opinions detrimental to the purity of the faith once delivered to the saints. Notwithstanding this, the golden candlesticks, as yet, remained in their places, and the Son of man was still among them.

In this case, what is the direction of the Spirit? Are these reprehensible churches to be removed? Is their ecclesiastical constitution to be broken up, in order to restore the members of which they consist to the simple faith and purity of the Gospel? By no means. Through their several *angels*, or apostolical ministers, they are commanded to repent and reform, not by discontinuing the unity of the church, but for the express purpose that the unity and identity of the body might be preserved.

To the authorised minister of the first of them (the church of Ephesus) the divine charge is this which I have chosen for my text—*Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first*

works ; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

"This charge is given to the angel or superintending minister, who is duly invested with authority, for the government of the church, and to whom the church, according to the constitution of the Gospel, owes submission and respect. It is not said to the members at large—Appoint unto yourselves a new order of ministers, and set up a new church in the room of the present degenerate body: the reformation, on the contrary, is to be effected in the same constituted body, and through the agency of the lawful presiding minister to whom the charge is addressed:—Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works—continue in the exercise of thy stewardship, only restore thy church to its primitive state in which it was at first established; otherwise thy candlestick shall be taken away—the society over which thou presidest shall cease from being a church at all.

"From all this we learn, that the reformation enjoined by the New Testament, when

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necessary, is not to be effected by removing the foundation which the apostles have laid —by framing a new church upon optional principles, and setting up a new order of ministry, disjoined from the apostolical succession. For such bold proceeding there is not a line of authority throughout the Christian Scriptures, nor a single sentence that can fairly be interpreted into a permission of any such thing.

On the contrary, we are uniformly taught that the great work of reformation is to take place in the same constituted body. The same angels, or duly-appointed and authorised ministers, who had presided in the corrupted, are also to preside in the regenerate church; and this church, notwithstanding its return from a state of depravity to its original purity and splendour, retains its identity; otherwise the golden symbol is removed out of its place, and though it may still subsist as a *synagogue of Satan*, it ceases to be acknowledged as a church of Christ.

That the identity of the *local* church may be preserved, in the progress of such an internal reform, will be readily admitted,

But here other questions, of no trivial moment, obtrude themselves on our notice. It will be asked—Must not such an independent act, in a collateral branch, affect the general unity of the visible church? And if so, what is to be done when a national church that constitutes a subordinate part of another local church, becomes sensible that, in common with its superior, it has fallen into error and depravity? Is it still to continue in the same depressed situation, in order to maintain its union? is it to dissolve this union by a voluntary separation from the elder branch? or, is it merely to regulate its own internal constitution, without a practical reference to the conduct of the other?

In reply to such questions, it must be observed, that there is no precept in the Gospel which enjoins union with error or corruption of any kind; and that our Lord constituted the stewards of his household, or local superintendants of his church, as brethren, upon an equality amongst themselves, and not as possessing the relative situations of masters and dependants.

Notwithstanding, therefore, every true

church is a member of the universal church of Christ—and in this sense all local churches, which have preserved the apostolical constitution, are members one of another—yet the Gospel does not enjoin the maintenance of union in any thing extraneous, much less repugnant, to that constitution.

The claim of superiority by the church of one sovereign state over that of another, is an usurpation not warranted by the Gospel. For it cannot be proved that one national church is made by the appointment of Christ, or by the laws of his apostles, a part and parcel of another national church as such; or so far subjected to it as a dependent member, that it cannot rectify error, reform abuse, and disallow corrupt usurpation, without mutual consent.

The seven churches in Asia Minor were members of the one body of Christ's visible church, and therefore in communion with each other, whilst they severally constituted parts of that body. But there was not such a mutual connection amongst them, or such a relation of superior and subordinate, but that either of them might reform internal abuse without necessarily producing

the reform of all the rest: or either of them might have apostatized, and have been utterly cut off, without affecting the integrity of the sister churches. Accordingly the Spirit addresses seasonable admonitions and threats to the ministers of each of these churches severally; which proves that each of them was competent to rectify what was amiss in its internal economy, without prejudice to the unity of the mystical body of Christ.

And the same thing is taught by our Lord in the Gospel, where he represents himself in union with his visible church, under the figure of a vine and its several branches. We are here told that the fruitful branch is pruned and improved by his heavenly Father, whilst the unfruitful branch is taken away. And this operation does not deprive the remaining branches of their communion with each other, and with the vine of the universal church.

It is therefore clear, from the tenor of the New Testament, that if one local or national church has been propagated from another; if, during their mutual communion, they have equally degenerated; and if, in

this degenerate state, the mother-church has claimed, and has been allowed, a superiority over the other; yet all this cannot deprive the younger church of the right of reforming abuses, of *remembering whence it has fallen, repenting, and doing the first works*: for the great law which binds every Christian church is, the constitution established by Christ and his apostles; and this law cannot be annulled by human usurpation.

Thus, for example, all the churches of the world sprung from the church of Jerusalem, which was a pure apostolical church when it first began to put forth its branches. The members of all the churches which sprung from this root, maintained their communion with the parent church, and with each other; but theirs was the fellowship of brethren, not the relation of a lord and his vassals. Had these local churches equally fallen into error during this communion, it is clear that either of them had a power to return to the supreme rule of the Gospel without obtaining the consent of the others, which we will suppose to have continued in error. Either of them had a right to separate itself from the errors and corruptions of

its fellow churches; still it would be bound to maintain its union with them as members of the universal church of Christ, as far as they continued to acknowledge and obey the truth, but no farther; for the Gospel does not enjoin a fellowship with error or corruption.

Or had the bishop of Jerusalem, forgetting the apostolical constitution, assumed a controuling power over the other bishops and their churches; and had this claim been inadvertently acknowledged for a long time; yet when it should have been discovered, upon reference to the apostolical constitution, that it was a mere usurpation, it might be safely disallowed; for the rule of the Gospel still remained in force. And this disallowance of an adventitious abuse, would not imply a separation from what was still pure and apostolical in the mother-church, or in any of its branches.

But beyond the rejection of error, and the reformation of abuse, no national branch of the church of Christ has a lawful power to innovate upon the sacred structure. It is not for them to remove the golden candle-

stick out of its place, or to dissolve the unity of the mystical body.

From this general view of the power which the local branches of the church possessed to reform error and abuse, I proceed to examine the case of our national establishment.

Here it need not be insisted upon, that we had, in this island, an apostolical and duly-constituted church for some ages before the Christian world heard the name, or felt the authority, of an universal bishop. For it is not to be denied that, in subsequent times, and for many centuries prior to the Reformation, our ancestors were in communion with the church of Rome, and in professed subjection to the authority of its bishop.

But this connection does not affect the solidity of our foundation; for it is acknowledged on all hands, that the church of Rome, in its original state, was apostolical and pure. This need not, therefore, be proved, from the writings of St. Paul, and the history of the primitive ages of Christianity.

If, however, erroneous opinions and irregular practices had begun to manifest themselves in the Christian church as early as the days of the apostles, it need not be matter of surprise if, during a long succession of dark and barbarous ages, such things should have been gradually introduced into the church of Rome. And this was the case.

Like the churches of Corinth, Galatia, and Asia Minor, this church also had fallen from its original purity. Through the weakness of fallible, or the designs of ambitious men, numerous, absurd, and unwarranted doctrines had been *added* to the faith once delivered to the saints, and many corrupt practices had been introduced detrimental to the purity of Christian conversation. These things greatly darkened the lustre of this church: but they had not destroyed its existence as a church of Christ. The golden candlestick still remained in its place.

Down to the age of the Reformation it preserved, amidst all its lamentable corruptions, and even to the present day it has maintained, the essential form of a church. Though it has wickedly withholden the Holy Scriptures from the people, and

greatly obstructed their influence, by the admixture of false or doubtful tradition, and the perverseness of interpretation, yet it has not denied their divine authority.

Notwithstanding its groundless and extraneous doctrines, it has persevered in the confession of all the fundamental articles of the true Christian faith contained in that creed which it always held in common, as to its general tenets, with the universal primitive church. And the sacraments ordained by the Gospel are here administered by a priesthood which derives its appointment, in uninterrupted succession, from the apostles ; and its authority from Christ our great master, and from God the Father of all.

Here, then, the golden candlestick has hitherto remained in its place; and it is not the province of man to remove it. Our ancestors did not, therefore, attempt this unwarranted act ; nor did they presume to dissolve the unity of the church ; but, according to the injunction of the Spirit to the angel of the church of Ephesus, they *remembered from whence they were fallen ; they repented, and did the first works ;* and

other words, they effected a reformation in the same body, without shaking the constitution, or sapping the foundation, of the church. And, in the prosecution of this labour, they did not resign their judgment to the various prepossessions and devices of insubordinate men; but kept a steady and determined eye upon the sacred rule of the Gospel, and the model of the primitive church, which the apostles had established upon earth, and committed to the care of their regular and lawful successors.

And how far the blessing of God attended their pious endeavours may be distinctly perceived at the present day; for, by the favour of a divine Providence, not only the rule of the Gospel still remains upon record, but also many of the writings of the early fathers, who, in the purer ages of Christianity, succeeded to the apostolical charge.

But let us take a nearer view of the age of the Reformation. About the commencement of the sixteenth century, when the veil of ignorance, which had long overspread the world, began to be removed, many pious and learned men perceived and

protested against the errors and abuses which prevailed amongst the hierarchy of Rome, and took some active measures to restore the church to that height from whence it was fallen.

Amongst the reformers of that age the fathers of our national church eminently distinguished themselves. Not actuated by the presumption of self-will—not following the devious tracks of private speculation—not aiming each to advance the reputation of his individual name, and place it at the head of a separate persuasion, like the heresiarchs of ancient and modern times, they took the Holy Scripture for their rule; they studiously attended to the form, the faith, and the practice of the primitive and uncorrupted church, and laboured to restore that church in its essential form of unity and harmony—not of division and contention—not as the church of *Paul*, of *Apollos*, or of *Cephas*—not as the church of *Luther*, of *Calvin*, or of *Knor*—but as the church of CHRIST. And thus they were enabled to discard error and reform abuse, without dividing the mystical body.

The assumed supremacy of the Pope

they justly disallowed, because this was no part of the original and apostolical constitution of the church of Rome; but a manifest usurpation, which had grown out of the depravity of a corrupt age. And those absurd doctrines and evil practices which were unauthorised by the word of God, unprecedented in the primitive apostolical church, and which history pointed out as spurious and corrupt innovation of mere human device, they also rejected.

But their abhorrence of the corruptions of the Roman church did not impel them rashly and unadvisedly to discard every thing that she retained, merely because she retained it. Their aim was to reform, not to subvert; to rectify, not to destroy. Hence they preserved the confession of the apostolical faith, the authorised succession of the ministry, the use of the sacred ordinances, and such institutions as were essential to the being of a church—such as were conducive to promote obedience to the laws of Christ, and habits of charity amongst men.

Whatever was of apostolical appointment—whatever was indispensably requisite to the very form and existence of a Christian church

—this they presumed not to remove. And in the disposal of those things which were of an indifferent nature, and had always been permitted to the judgment of the *authorised stewards* of Christ's household—such as the framing of a public liturgy, the regulating of the form of public worship, and the establishing of laws and constitutions for the maintenance of due order, harmony, and internal discipline—they directed their view to the cause of general edification, under the guidance of the holy Scripture, and of authorised usage, in the primitive ages of Christianity.

By this discreet and temperate proceeding our reformers were enabled to preserve their union even with the church of Rome, whilst they laboured to restore that branch of it which was planted in these realms to the state in which the Roman church had existed, when the apostle testified that *its faith was spoken of throughout the whole world*—and that *its obedience was come abroad unto all men*. (Rom. i. 8.; xvi. 19.)

And this uninterrupted union was so plainly perceived, and so fully acknowledged, both by the members of the reformed

church and by those of the Roman communion, that multitudes of the latter joined with us in public worship, and in the celebration of the Lord's Supper; and, provided they lived as became the Gospel of Christ, they were received without scruple. So far were the conscientious members of either of those churches from regarding themselves as separated from their Christian brethren, And hence, the great act of our pious ancestors is not called a *breach*, but a *reformation*.

But the bishop of Rome, not being disposed to a similar reformation, and probably dreading the effect of such fellowship with a society in which his usurpation was disallowed, and his errors exposed, by a formal edict, passed an unwarranted censure on the church of England, and forbade the use of its sacraments to the members of his communion.

Hence it evidently follows, that it is not upon *us* that the charge of separation must attach. *They went out from us*; not we from them. We reformed abuses, which did not originally and properly belong to the constitution of the church. We obeyed the injunction of the Holy Spirit, in remem-

bering from whence we were fallen, repenting, and doing the first work. But the act of separation, which the same spirit expressly forbids, was the act of the Roman hierarchy. Our reformers, therefore, cannot be justly charged with the crime of having divided the body of Christ, nor can their conduct be pleaded as a precedent to the dissensions of the present age.

Of this our opponents themselves appear to be conscious, when they reverse the argument, and impute it to us as a grievous charge, that we have retained much of the form and usage of the church of Rome.

But whilst we can plead the injunctions of the New Testament, the apostolical institution, and the usage of the primitive church, for *what we have done*, and *what we have left undone*, we shrink not from this charge. We are ready to answer in our own defence. And we could wish, in charity, that the church of Rome, and other communions of professed Christians, would imitate and even excel the conduct of our national reformers.

Happy for the Christian world would it have been, had other reformers preserved the same temperance, moderation, and

evangelical spirit of charity; had they as steadily kept in view the apostolical constitution of the church, and the harmonious model which it exhibited in its early and brighter day. But, without impeaching the sincerity of their professions, or the uprightness of their intention, it must be lamented that, in many instances, their proceedings were rash and unwarranted. The proper work of reformation is, to restore the church to that state of perfection in which it originally stood: not to remove the foundation, but to repair the breaches of the structure. And the example of the church of England sufficiently proves, that this might be done without destroying the unity of the body.

But, alas! in removing the errors and rubbish of degenerate Rome, many have effaced the beautiful edifice of the Christian church, so that its essential form, as constituted by Christ and his apostles, and exemplified in the earlier and happier days of Christianity, can no longer be recognized. Instead of maturely studying and duly attending to the direction of the word of God, and the plan of the primitive church, many

leaders of reformation listened to the suggestions of human judgment, realized the visions of vain imagination, or obeyed the dictates of angry passion. The corruptions of the church of Rome were glaringly manifest, and its tyranny was felt. But does it follow, that orderly Christians, in their abhorrence of this corruption and tyranny, were at liberty to abandon every principle, every institution, all form, all discipline, which prevailed in this church, without enquiring whether it were evangelical or not, or whether a church of Christ could exist without it?

Such a licentious persuasion is surely a *root of bitterness, which troubles the flock of Christ, and whereby many have been defiled.* It began to vegetate in this country in the days of Elizabeth; and, in a more recent age, when men relinquished all respect to civil as well as ecclesiastical authority, it flourished in full luxuriance, and scattered its baneful and pernicious seeds throughout the land. These seeds have been further extended, and their wild produce pampered and cherished, by an abuse of the act of toleration;—a law which had for its object

the forbearance of persecution, but not the encouragement of schism and dissension. So that, in the present day, we have societies of nominal Christians without an order of duly appointed ministers, without a common liturgy, without a public profession of the faith, and without sacraments. And many amongst us appear even to have forgotten that separation from the fellowship of the apostolical church is in itself a grievous sin, expressly forbidden in the Gospel of Christ; and that those who hope for salvation without a predominant purpose of obeying his laws, presume beyond what is written, and hope without promise.

SERMON XIV.
OF THE CHARACTER AND DUTIES OF A
CHRISTIAN MINISTER.

1 PETER, V. 1, 2, 3.

The elders which are among you I exhort, who are also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.

THE well-being and prosperity of the church of Christ must, in a great measure, depend upon the fidelity, the diligence, the unremitting watchfulness, of those ministers to whose charge it is committed; and upon their supporting a truly evangelical and exemplary character, in the sight of all men. It therefore behoves us, my brethren, seriously

to recall to mind those things which are required of us in virtue of our office; that thus, having a distinct apprehension of our various duties, we may apply to them in such a manner, as to keep ourselves pure from the blood of all men, and be prepared to render our account with joy, and not with grief. And for our assistance in this theme of contemplation, which is to us of infinite importance, I would bespeak our mutual attention to the several particulars of that comprehensive exhortation which the apostle has addressed to the elders of the church in general, and to us individually, as included in that sacred order, and fixed in a station of high responsibility. In the first place, then, we have to remark, that St. Peter's precepts are enforced by the authority, and directed to their proper end by the light, of his own example. *The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder.* He does not call upon the ministers of the church, to frame to themselves some ideal standard of perfection, each submitting to the guidance of his own judgment, or determined by the preponderance of his peculiar temper and habits; but to apply their labours, and

regulate their conduct, by a practicable and extensible pattern that is set before them.

This is not only the most easy and simple rule of direction, but it is a rule which, in this case, carries along with it the demonstration of its own propriety: for it is the obvious duty of every minister of the Gospel, to propose to himself the pattern of those *witnesses of the sufferings of Christ, and partakers of the glory that shall be revealed*; of those *faithful stewards of the mysteries of God*, who were formed under the immediate discipline and tuition of our blessed Lord, and completely prepared for their office by the visible guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This is surely the duty of every Christian, and especially of every Christian minister. But, lest the church should, at any time, overlook a principle so essential, it is repeatedly inculcated by the great apostle of the Gentiles.

Thus, he writes to the Corinthians—*Be ye followers of me, EVEN AS I, ALSO AM OF CHRIST.* (1 Cor. xi. 1.) Thus, to the Philippians—*Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye*

have us for an ensample. (Phil. iii. 17.)
 And again—*These things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen to be in me, do. (Ch. iv. 9.)*

So, also, he commends the Thessalonians, for their laudable attention to this duty:—
Ye became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost; so that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. (1 Thess. i. 6, 7.)

Thus it is the sacred duty of the whole church, and of its ministers more especially, to follow the pattern of the apostles, even as they were followers of Christ.

St. Peter having, therefore, proposed his own general example to the elders of the church, proceeds to discriminate particular branches of duty, which arise from a faithful imitation of the apostolical pattern: and this precept stands foremost in the solemn charge—*Feed the flock of God which is among you.*

In the language of the holy Scripture, the church of God is often denominated *a flock*, in allusion to the unremitted vigilance and care which are requisite for its protection

and due support: so, also, the minister of the church has the name of *a shepherd*, as illustrative of his correlative duties. And, if we attend to the analogy that really exists between the objects thus compared, the remarkable fitness of these metaphors will appear in many striking points of view.

The sheep of which the flock is composed, being a feeble, inoffensive race, are not qualified, like beasts of prey, to hunt and procure their own food. It is, therefore, the shepherd's business to provide for their daily wants, and lead them to their appropriate pasture. So, the members of the church cannot by contention and debate procure an adequate support in the projecting forests of philosophy, but must be carefully directed to their spiritual food in the word of God.

The natural simplicity of the sheep disposes them to wander from the flock heedlessly, and without apprehension of evil. Thus, they often put themselves in the way of danger: but it is the shepherd's duty to keep a watchful eye over his improvident charge; to tell the number of his flock; to seek and restore that which was lost; to

bind up and heal that which was torn. The analogy of our charge and of our duty, in this particular, is too obvious to require illustration.

Again: whilst the sheep themselves are not the enemies of any living creature, they are exposed to the attacks of various and formidable assailants. If the insidious thief or the scattering wolf approach the peaceful field, he finds the flock naturally timid and defenceless. Resistance is not in their power: much less are they qualified to pursue and destroy the malignant foe. It is, therefore, the shepherd's province to keep his eye upon the insidious aggressor, to oppose him with the weapons of his office, and stand firm in the defence of his charge, which, like the church of Christ, is not empowered to resist evil with evil.

The sheep also, like the members of the church, are, for greater security, brought together into their common fold; but still it is the office of the shepherd to go round the borders of the inclosure, to see that all its pales are in good order, to recount the number of his sheep, and protect them from the intrusion of the nightly foe.

Whilst we thus perceive that the church of Christ is analogous to a flock of sheep, let us not forget that we ourselves have the responsibility of shepherds. And if unre-mitted care and vigilance are required in every man who is entrusted with the pas-toral office, how much more in the spiritual pastor, who has the charge of *the flock of God?*

The character and duties required in our station are described, by our blessed Lord, to this effect.—The good shepherd climbeth not over the fence into the sheep-fold—he is no irregular intruder; when he taketh upon him the pastoral office, he entereth in by the door of the fold: to him the porter openeth; the sheep hear his voice; he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them into their appointed pasture. When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, he sheweth them the path in which they ought to walk, and they follow him; for they know his voice. If the thief come to steal, and to kill, and to destroy; if the scattering wolf howl about the corners of the field; the good shepherd fleeth not at the approach of danger: he doth not abandon

his charge, like the interested hireling: he is ready to lay down his life in defence of the flock: he collects them into the one fold, appointed and provided by the chief shepherd. (*John, x.*)

Such is the pastoral care which our Lord has expressly, and confidentially, committed to the chosen ministers of his church.

When he addresses this church in the following gracious words—*Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom;*—he proceeds to impress upon those servants to whose charge his *little flock* is intrusted, the duty of vigilance and assiduity. Upon this occasion, St. Peter enquires of him—*Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us—unto us, thine apostles—or even unto all?* Our Lord replies—*Who, then, is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.* (Luke, xii. 41, &c.)

By this passage it appears, that the care of the *little flock* is pointedly committed to those ministers whom Christ officially sends

forth. And the same appointment is confirmed by our Lord, when, after his resurrection, he thrice addresses, to the same apostle, this solemn question—*Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?* And having received an assurance of his love and attachment, he thrice repeats the emphatical charge—*Feed my lambs*; and *Feed my sheep*. This pastoral office St. Peter was commanded to execute, as a proof of his sincere love to his Master: he was to execute this office by virtue and authority of his Master's express commission, and after the example of his Master, in feeding his Father's sheep; for it is added, in the sequel, *Follow thou me!* (John, xxi.)

Hence it appears that St. Peter, in the words of the text, commits to the elders of the church that pastoral office which he himself had received from the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. Of the important duties, of the high degree of responsibility, annexed to this their appointed station, St. Paul thus reminds the elders of the church at Ephesus, and sets before them a cogent motive to redouble their vigilance, their assiduity, and their zeal:—*I am pure,*

says he, *from the blood of all men* : for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that, after my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. And of yourselves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, watch : and remember that, by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one, night and day, with tears. (Acts, xxi. 26, &c.)

Should any contend that, in our days, such extraordinary exertions are not required, they will have to prove that, in the present age, there are no grievous wolves troubling the flock, no perverse teachers drawing away disciples after them. If this cannot be proved, we see what is our duty, and what our responsibility. If souls are lost through our neglect, the day of recompense will come, and blood will be required.

* St. Peter having, therefore, urged the

sacred and indispensable duty of the ministers of the church to *feed the flock of God*, proceeds, in the next place, to discriminate the temper and disposition with which this important office is to be executed—*Taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly*: or, as the words seem rather to imply, *superintending, not compulsively, but voluntarily*: for the apostle is not giving direction as to the manner of *taking*, but of *exercising*, the sacred office.

Hence his exhortation takes hold of the present age of the church. Many amongst us may be found, who would take upon themselves a post of honour and of profit, *not by constraint, but willingly*; but the question still returns, *Who is prepared and disposed to fill the duties of his station worthily and conscientiously?*

The persons to whom the apostle addresses himself are *now* elders of the church, the same sense as St. Peter himself is an elder: for he speaks to them in the character of *συνπρεσβυτερος*, or a *fellow-elder*. It is therefore implied, by the nature of their station, that the duty of superintendence, in a larger or more limited sense, according

to their rank and order, either as bishops of districts or pastors of particular congregations, already pertains to them. Consequently, the exhortation refers to the temper and disposition with which this duty is to be discharged: and here we find something forbidden, and something enjoined.

It is forbidden to exercise the superintending office with *reluctance* and *alienation of mind*; as he may be said to do, who regards his duty as a burthen, and not as a delight. Such a man is an eye-servant. He does not give his duty the first place in his heart. He satisfies his own conscience, by doing nothing more than what the general laws of the church expressly enjoin; and even this he does, merely because it is enjoined, and cannot, with impunity, be left undone. Or, perhaps, he gladly avails himself of the far lower standard, to which the stated duties of his office may have been reduced by the silent lapse of custom. Even this external show of duty is, probably, dispatched with the least possible exertion, in a manner so indifferent, so indolent, as to prove that it is the minister's highest ambition to elude public censure, by shel-

tering himself under the wings of modish ease: that it is not his aim to edify the church, or to merit the approbation of his heavenly Master. He substitutes regularity for energy; formality, for diligence; fashionable apathy, for Christian zeal. The standard of his character, and of his duty, is upheld by custom and the opinion of the gay circles, not by conscience and integrity. His own indulgence, his own vanity, his own interest, constitute the great object of his labours, instead of the preservation and improvement of his flock. Should the tumult of his neglected sheep occasionally disturb his repose, he opens a languid eye, and faintly exclaiming—*It is the robber—It is the wolf*—calmly resumes his slumbers. With reason does the apostle deprecate this reluctance, this privation of zeal and energy, in the discharge of ministerial duties. Where this evil prevails, it cannot but be highly detrimental to the cause of true religion. The infection of heedlessness, indifference, and apathy, is gradually communicated to the flock. And whilst the indolent shepherd is folding his arms, the wandering sheep either entangle themselves in the brakes of

infidelity, destroy their health in the cold swamps of moral formality, or else are scattered and lacerated by the howling and ravening wolves.

In opposition to this unprofitable service, St. Peter exhorts the elders of the church to discharge their pastoral office with a prompt and willing disposition of mind—with a love of the cause in which they are engaged—with a due respect to the authority of God, to their own awful responsibility, and to the spiritual edification of the flock.

This temper and disposition, in a minister of Christ, will suggest the necessity of becoming useful to the advancement of the church in every way, and by all means that may be practicable, within the limits of good and lawful discipline. It will, consequently, lead to the performance of many local and particular duties which could not have been provided for and enforced by general rules; and to the revival and improvement of many others which, though expressly enjoined, have gradually fallen into disuse.

Particularly, this temper of mind will dispose the worthy pastor to a more frequent

and diligent instruction of the poor and ignorant, in the principles of revealed religion; to make it his constant study, to give the most illiterate a true apprehension of his Christian faith, and his Christian duty; as being fully aware that, in the sight of God, the soul of the meanest of his brethren is as precious as his own soul. In preaching the Gospel to the poor, he will, especially, inculcate the necessity of a regular attendance at the solemnities of public worship, and the religious observance of the Lord's day. In declaring the doctrines and enforcing the precepts of the Gospel to all ranks of his congregation, his manner will be so solemn, so earnest, so impressive, as to show the full engagement of his own mind, and to influence the minds of others.

With a zeal tempered by discretion and by charity, he will maintain the faith and discipline of the church, so as to stop the mouths of adversaries and gainsayers, without inflaming the passions of any by angry reproach. And these duties he will perform with such a manifest feeling of their importance, such generous allurement of brotherly love, such amplitude of Christian

charity, as to engage the attention and win the affection of his hearers. Thus, he will make it their chief delight to walk in the path of righteousness, in which their minister walks before them. Such is the influence of the elder who feeds the flock of God, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly.

To this degree of usefulness, however, none can attain but he who is influenced by the purest and most disinterested motives. The apostle, therefore, in the next place, exhorts the elders of the church to apply themselves to the duties of their office, not from the motive of *filthy lucre*, but of a *ready mind*.

The prohibitory part of this sentence demands particular notice; for the clergy have been subjected to much undue and uncharitable censure, owing to the misapprehension, or misrepresentation, of this and the like passages of Scripture: and, on the other hand, it is to be feared that they have occasionally laid themselves open to just reprehension, for want of a due regard to the apostolical prohibition.

By many of the adversaries of our church,

it has been imputed as a reproach to its ministers, that they claim and receive any temporal advantage whatsoever, as a reward of their spiritual labours : but this censure is not more unreasonable than it is unchristian.

When our Lord sends forth his twelve apostles to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, to impart freely, and impartially, those spiritual gifts which they had freely received, he does not mean, by the precept *freely give*, that they were to receive no present recompence : for he commands them at the same time, *Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, in your purses, nor script for your journey; neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves : for the workman is worthy of his meat.* (Matt. x. 9, 10.)

They are also directed—*In the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give : for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house—procure not your support by collecting alms as mendicants, but receive it as your merited reward ;—and into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you.* (Luke, x. 7, 8.)

Here the ministers of Christ are forbidden,

when they enter upon their public office, to furnish themselves with such provision or apparel as may be necessary for them in the discharge of that office; nor are they to provide themselves with money, as the means of procuring such necessities. All that is requisite for their due support, in the work of the ministry, they are, by our Lord's appointment, to receive from those to whom they minister in the Gospel. It is, therefore, the ordinance of our divine Master, that Christian ministers should receive—and, consequently, it is lawful for them to receive—such convenient provision as is made for them; and to receive it as the reward of their ministry.

The exact measure of that provision, which was intended for the ministry in succeeding ages, is not declared in the New Testament; because in the days of our Lord and his apostles Christianity had not the support of a civil establishment, and the Levitical priesthood was not, as yet, arrived at its final period. We cannot, however, but observe the analogy between the condition of Christ's ministers, who are

forbidden to provide for themselves a necessary support in the discharge of their office, and that of the Levites, to whom an appropriate inheritance was not assigned in the division of the promised land; but for whom the Lord had reserved a stated portion, out of all the temporal blessings which he bestowed upon their brethren.

This idea appears to be confirmed by St. Paul; when he commands the members of the church—*Let him that is taught in the word communicate to him that teacheth in all good things—let him impart a portion of all the temporal goods which the Lord hath given him.* And, lest any should presume that they are worthy and acceptable Christians, without the faithful discharge of this duty, it is immediately added—*Be not deceived. God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh—he that regardeth only his worldly advantage—shall of the seed reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit—he that is liberal in supporting the interest of religion—shall, of the spirit, reap life everlasting.* (Gal. vi. 6, 7, 8, 9.)

This command, to impart to the ministers, of the Gospel a portion of all temporal goods, is analogous to the general ordinance of the law in behalf of the sons of Levi, and the rule is not to be contempted; for it must be remembered, that its sanction takes hold of the ultimate hopes of Christianity.

Again: the same apostle thus instructs the bishop, of the Ephesians:—*Let the elders that rule well, be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.* These elders are to be honoured by an appropriate and liberal portion of worldly substance: for, as it follows, *The Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn; and the labourer is worthy of his hire.* (1 Tim. v. 17, 18.)

Here the apostle enforces the precept by two general maxims, one of which is taken immediately out of the law of Moses, and the other adopted from the Gospel of Christ, who had ratified and confirmed it out of the same law; thus clearly intimating that the primitive ordinance is still binding in behalf of Christian ministers—that the certain and permanent provision which the law

has appointed for the priesthood, is not removed by the Gospel—and, therefore, that it is lawful for Christian ministers to receive such provision.

It has been objected, however, that this principle is not confirmed by the practice of St. Paul himself, who says, in the ninth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians—*What is my reward, then? Verily, that; when I preach the Gospel, I may make the Gospel of Christ without charge; that I abuse not my power in the Gospel.*

But this apostle, it must be recollected, was not sent to the house of Israel—to a people who understood the tenor, and acknowledged the obligation, of that law which provided for the ministry. He preached the Gospel among the heathen, in places where he found no true believers to reward his first labours. In the early part of his ministry he had, therefore, no resource but to provide for his own sustenance by his manual labour. And in succeeding periods he thought it expedient to persist in the same practice, whilst he ministered to the infant churches of the Gentiles, lest he should give offence to those whom he hoped

to convert, or hinder the advancement of the Gospel, by exposing his own conduct to the danger of misrepresentation. He was determined to convince all men, that his motives were pure and disinterested.

But how far he intended that his own practice and example, in this instance, should pass into a general and permanent rule, is a circumstance that may be learned from his open declaration in this very chapter. The several particulars which he brings forward upon this subject; are highly deserving of our consideration.

In the first place, he asserts his apostolical character, and points to the church of Corinth as the fruit and seal of his sacred mission.—*Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? If I be not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you; for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord.* The design of this animated exhortation is, to ground upon it a general answer to certain false brethren, who appear, from the context, to have stirred up a variety of schismatical cavils—as, first, that St. Paul must be accounted far inferior to the other apostles, because

he received no recompense for his spiritual labours; secondly, that the other apostles were to be charged with acting upon interested motives, because they did not follow the rule of St. Paul; and, thirdly, that whatever the practice of the one or the other might be, they ought certainly to deliver their spiritual instructions without charge. As the discussion of these points falls in with the temper of our age, it may not be unreasonable to consider, briefly, how the apostle has answered his opponents.

My answer to them that examine me, is this;—Have we not power to eat and to drink?—Does not my character, as an apostle and minister of Christ—does not my ministerial labour in the church—does not the success of that labour prove my right to receive that convenient support which the Lord himself has appointed?

Nbr is it only a personal support, to which the minister is entitled. The claim extends to his family: for, as St. Paul proceeds—Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as the other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?

And it was the general rule of the apostle—

keel ministers, to abstain from manual labour, and to live by the reward of their ministry; as appears from the next question—*Or I only, and Barnabas, have we not power to forbear working?*—have we not a right, according to the general usage of the ministry, to abstain from a secular employ, and receive the fruit of our spiritual labours?

In the next place, St. Paul evinces the reasonableness of this rule by general analogy:—*Who goeth a warfare, any time, at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?*

He then proceeds to shew, that this plain deduction of reason is ratified and confirmed by the word of God:—*Say I these things as a man?—Do I support the claim of the ministry upon more human arguments?—or saith not the law the same also?—For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn.* And the moral precepts of that law remain in force: for thus the apostle argues:—*Doth God take care for*

aren; or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sake, no doubt, this is written—that he that ploweth, should plow in hope; and he that thresheth in hope, should be partaker of his hope—that the minister who laboureth in the Gospel might have a well-founded expectation of support from the members of the church.

The apostle then proceeds to shew, that Christians, if they disallow this equitable and sacred claim, are chargeable with ingratitude and injustice; and that no debt whatever can be more binding upon a pure conscience. *If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather?*

And, finally, though St. Paul, for local and temporal reasons, has waved his equitable claim during the early propagation of the Gospel among the Gentiles; yet he insists upon the general rule of the law, and declares, that the very same rule is still in force in behalf of Christian ministers; and that it is so by the express ordinance of Christ.

Notwithstanding, says the apostle, we have not used this power—have not enforced our claim to a competent support—but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the Gospel of Christ; yet, do ye not know, that they which minister about holy things, live of the things of the temple, and they which wait at the altar, are partakers with the altar? Granting that it is so appointed under the Levitical law, what follows? Let us hear—even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel.

Upon the whole, then, the apostle's reasoning comes to this conclusion—that it is the sacred duty of Christians, to appoint to their ministers a temporal reward of their labours, a competent means of subsistence, exactly analogous to the provision which is made for the priesthood under the Mosaic law; and, consequently, that it is lawful for ministers to receive and appropriate such reward. This is not an appointment of mere human device. It is the ordinance of Christ and his apostles: and we know that, by the law of Christ, every one who calls upon his name shall be judged in the last

day ; and that, whatsoever his apostles have bound on earth, is also bound in heaven.

In this case, the answer of a good conscience is audible and distinct. *To him that hath ears to hear*, it plainly declares, that the receiving of that temporal and stated provision, to which, by the ordinance of Christ, and the laws of our land, they have an exclusive claim, can be no subject of just reproach to the ministers of our church ; and that the temperate vindication of their right is not what St. Peter disallows, when he forbids the elders to superintend the flock of God from the motive of *filthy lucre*. This lucre, when claimed with moderation, and employed with decency and sobriety, is not filthy : it is hallowed and purified by the laws of God and man.

Let us, then, in the next place, enquire what it is which the apostle has here prohibited.

It appears from other passages in which the phrase occurs, that those very revenues of the ministry, which in themselves are lawful and pure, may become *filthy lucre*, or *sordid gain*, when they have a corrupt influence upon the mind and conduct of him that receives them.

St. Paul gives Timothy certain instructions relative to the deportment of a Christian bishop; and the same moral lesson must be understood as affecting the subordinate ranks of the ministry:—*a bishop, says the apostle, must not be greedy of filthy lucre, but patient: not a brawler, not covetous.* (1 Tim. iii. 2.)

Here we find, that a greediness of filthy lucre is, on the one hand, opposed to *patience*, and, on the other, identified with a *brawling avaricious disposition*. Hence it appears, that a hasty, rigorous, and litigious exaction, even of a lawful right, proceeding from a covetous temper, debases that revenue which in its own nature is sanctified and holy. Accordingly, the same apostle thus reproves the Corinthians, and expostulates with them upon their unchristian conduct:—*There is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?* (1 Cor. vi. 7.) Not that the minister, or any other member of the church, as it appears by the context, is required to abandon the defence

of his property; or that he cannot, in a case of necessity, bring his equitable claim before a Christian tribunal; but, whilst he compels others *to do justly*, he must not forget, that it is his own duty *to love mercy*. He is not to *exact the uttermost farthing* from a poor and distressed brother. He is not to *take his fellow-servant by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest*. Whatever he may exact in this uncharitable way, notwithstanding it be his lawful claim, it becomes *filthy lucre*; for, most assuredly, *it defiles the man*.

Again: Titus is admonished by the same apostle, that a *bishop must not be given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate*. (Titus, i. 7, 8.)

Here we learn, that the revenues of the church become *filthy lucre* when they are either treasured up in a sordid penurious manner, inconsistent with the spirit of discreet *hospitality*, and the habits of edifying society, or else are prodigally lavished in riot and dissipation—in a vain ostentatious show, beyond what the rank of the minister

may demand; or in excessive self-indulgence, contrary to the rules of *sobriety, justice, holiness, and temperance.*

Another thing which may render the minister's revenue *sordid and defiled*, is his making of it the principal object of his attention and regard, to the exclusion of that care and vigilance, for the spiritual welfare of the flock, which in his station ought to be the prevailing motive—the governing principle of his profession. Thus, our Lord distinguishes the interested hireling from the good shepherd:—*The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep; but he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling—because his thoughts are fixed only upon his secular reward—and careth not for the sheep.* (John, x. 11—13.)

It is not the intention of this passage to criminate the minister because he receiveth a temporal reward; for, as we have already seen, our Lord himself has declared, with reference to this subject, that the labourer

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is worthy of his meat, and of his hire: and it is his express ordinance, that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel. But the charge preferred against the unworthy pastor is this—that, whilst he neglects the arduous duties of his station, he makes his secular reward the great object of his care, and the chief motive of his profession; that, if he can but secure this, he is easily prevailed upon to desert his trust, to withdraw into the shades of a spurious liberality, and abandon the sheep to the mercy of the scattering wolf, or of the insidious thief, whether he approach the fold in the garb of a schismatic, a fanatic, or an infidel.

This man's hire is to him *filthy lucre*: it is not the reward of a just and faithful service. His own hand, therefore, defiles it. How does the heedless pastor ground his claim to any reward whatsoever? His person is not familiar to the flock: his voice is known to them only by the repeated calls for his unmerited hire: his very habits have disqualified him for the effecting of any useful purpose. Should he make an unwonted effort to warn the flock of their

peril, the sheep, instead of avoiding the wolf, would turn with astonishment to gaze at the stranger.

But let us extend our view of this subject, which, in itself, is neither uninteresting nor unimportant.

As the two covenants which God made with man are declared by the same spirit, and directed to the same end; as the moral obligations under both these covenants are the same; our Lord and his apostles often derive their moral instructions from the Old Testament, and from this source the distinction between the good and the bad shepherd more especially flows. It may, therefore, be proper for us to weigh a few of the particulars which are delivered, in the older scriptures, upon the case before us.

The sons of Eli, as to their appointment, were lawful and duly-constituted priests of the Lord, by whose ordinance a liberal reward was annexed to their office. But, by their riotous and unhallowed way of living, and by their indecent rapacity in exacting the perquisites of their station, whilst they disregarded its duties, *they made the people*

of the Lord to transgress, so that men abhorred the offering of the Lord.

In this aversion to the sacred ordinances, the Israelites were highly culpable. The Lord's offering was still holy, being sanctified by his express appointment. They ought to have attended to their own duty, and to have left the crimes of the priests to the justice of God, who best knows how and when to call them to account. But as the priests, by their atrocious conduct, gave immediate occasion to the public delinquency, they were, by the divine wrath, marked out for the more signal punishment: at the same time, the congregation was humbled for its transgression, by the loss of the ark of God's covenant. To the sons of Eli the emolument of their office was filthy and fatal lucre, because it was not sanctified by a holy and temperate disposition of mind; and a faithful discharge of their sacred duty.

Let us now attend to a general declaration of the same Scriptures. The Lord, by the mouth of Ezekiel, thus reproves the greedy shepherds, who regard only their

own profit, and neglect the edification of the people.—

Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool; ye kill them that are fed; but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened; neither have ye healed that which was sick; neither have ye bound up that which was broken; neither have ye brought again that which was driven away; neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them. (Ezek. xxxiv. 2—6.)

In the sequel of this paragraph, the Lord declares that he will require his flock

at the hand of these unworthy shepherds, and will deprive them of the office which they have thus abused. And to the same purpose is the following passage of Zechariah:—The Lord commands the prophet, *Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd. For lo! I will raise up a shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that be cut off; neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that which is broken, nor feed that which standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear the claws in pieces. Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! The sword shall be upon his arm—his pastoral authority—and upon his right eye—his beloved gain;—his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.* (Zech. xi. 15—17.)

These passages illustrate our Lord's meaning, where he discriminates between the good shepherd and the sordid hireling, who loveth his reward, but careth not for the sheep. And, agreeably to this, it is to be remarked, that St. Peter, in the words of my text, opposes to the motive of filthy lucre, of gains thus unhallowed, the alacrity

of a ready mind, a leading and predominant purpose of heart, disposing the worthy minister faithfully and diligently to discharge the sacred duties of his office, to the general edification of the church, and the spiritual improvement of its individual members; and prompting him to use the temporal reward of his ministry, not for the purpose of self-aggrandisement or self-gratification, but as the means of doing good in the station in which he is placed—of adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

And for the promoting of this worthy and most important design, St. Peter's exhortation, in the last place, has respect to the outward deportment of ministers in the society of their Christian brethren—*Neither as being lords over God's heritage, nor, as domineering over your respective allotments—but being ensamples to the flock.*

That we may be duly guarded against a common perversion of the apostle's meaning in this passage, be it first of all remarked, that the sacred writer is not withholding from the ministry that spiritual authority which, according to their respective order, is requisite for the due discharge of their of-

see. How can the parochial pastor *feed the flock*, if he has not a right to claim the attention of his congregation ; if he has not authority to lead, to instruct, to direct them ? How can the bishop superintend the flock of a larger district, together with its local pastors, if the flock be not committed to his charge ? St. Peter cannot, therefore, be supposed to disallow the exercise of that authority which is essential to the due government of the church, and which he has strictly enjoined in this very paragraph—*feed the flock, taking the oversight thereof* :—nor, indeed, is the apostolical prohibition directed against any lawful authority whatsoever, but against the affectation of a certain unedifying superiority, or absolute mastership, which is utterly inconsistent with the ministerial character. Accordingly, we find that the affectation of dominion here prohibited, is not contrasted with an equality of rank, but with an equality of moral obligation. *Being lords over God's heritage*, is opposed to *being examples to the flock*. Christian ministers are not to imitate certain arbitrary lords, who regard themselves as exempt, by prerogative, from

the obligation of those laws which they prescribe to others.

This subject may be illustrated by the example of certain ministers in the Jewish church, concerning whom *Jesus spake to the multitude, AND TO HIS DISCIPLES, saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all, therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do.* Thus far, their pastoral authority being *lawful* in itself, is recognised and confirmed. Still, however, they were not edifying pastors; they did not conduct themselves as good examples to the flock: wherefore their *practice* is thus reproved and disallowed:—*But do not ye after their works: for they say and do not; for they bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.* Whilst they taught the precepts of the law, they themselves dispensed with the observance of moral duties; because they did not place themselves upon an equal footing with the people, as in this respect they ought to have done; but affected to be lords over God's heritage.

—*They loved the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.* (Matt. xxiii. 1, &c.) Thus they assumed to themselves an arrogant pre-eminence, which set them wholly apart from the people, and therefore was detrimental to the cause of edification. And as our Saviour, whilst he confirms the lawful authority of these teachers, forbids his disciples to copy their domineering pattern, so we may understand St. Peter's exhortation to this effect.—

Feed the flock of God, exercising a superintending authority as faithful stewards, but not as arbitrary lords. When ye recommend the duties of religion to others, forget not that they are also your own duties, and that ye ought to excel in them, for examples' sake. If ye preach humility, be humble; if ye preach charity, open wide your hand; if ye preach patience and forbearance, be not rash or soon angry. Remember that ye are promoted to your station, not for your own personal aggrandisement, but for the spiritual edification of the church.

I shall not at this time consider the va-

rious cases of undue assumption which may arise from vanity or self-indulgence ; yet it may be proper to mark that domineering spirit which the apostle has censured in one of its properties, which not only deforms the private character, but, in a great measure, frustrates the very intention of the ministry.

This spirit is never more odious, or less edifying, than when it manifests itself in a proud, haughty, and disdainful carriage, which repels the modest and timid, and glances over the heads of the humble and the poor. Should such a deformity ever disgrace a Christian pastor, it must necessarily withdraw him from that improving intercourse which it is his duty to maintain with every order of his flock.

The elder of the church has, indeed, a becoming dignity to support. It is not required of him to demean himself below his rank, by assimilating with the manners of the inferior classes, by taking his place at their tables, claiming his part in their trivial discourse, and adopting many habits unbeseeming his character, but which their

occupations may have rendered innocent, perhaps necessary.

But true dignity is easy and unconcerned. It is not harassed with the perpetual jealousy of its own rights. It withholds neither the smile of benevolence, the ear, the eye, the hand of charity, nor the word of consolation. From kindness, affability, and open, unembarrassed condescension, it receives its strongest support, its most graceful ornament. And the pastor who refuses these attentions to the very lowest member of the church, cannot be said to exhibit a good example to the flock : he domineers over God's heritage, of which he is *not the master, but the minister*, appointed for their good, not for the display of his own pomp and vanity.

And how can the church be benefited by the ministry of the proud man ? He is not beloved : he does not engage the affection and esteem of his hearers : he is, therefore, heard with coldness and indifference, if not with aversion and disgust. He may recommend the duties of Christianity with the most persuasive eloquence ; but his oratory

only reminds the audience, that his own temper is utterly unchristian. For inordinate pride of superior rank, superior wealth, or superior attainments, and an insolent contempt of those to whom God has been less bountiful of temporal good, and of the means of distinction, imply a practical censure on the dispensations of divine Providence.

To men of this temper, the apostle of our Lord addresses the following language:—*Who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou, that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst RECEIVE it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?* (1 Cor. iv. 7.)

The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord: the proud man, therefore, behaves himself indecently, as the disciple and servant of the meek, humble, and condescending Jesus. The great Master saith to all his disciples—*Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.* (Matt. xi. 29.)

When he condescended to perform an humble office, for the poorest of his followers, it was with a practical design: for he tells them, *I have given you an example,*

that ye should do as I have done unto you.
(John, xiii. 15.)

In another place, having reminded his disciples that heathen princes exercised a haughty dominion over those who were subject to their jurisdiction, he proceeds to forbid the imitation of these despots, and to inculcate his own example.—*It shall not be so among you ; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister ; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant ; even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.* (Matt. xx. 26—28.) That is—be not proud ; be not tyrannical ; but let it be your great distinction, your chief excellence, to become eminently subservient to the edification of your brethren.

He who gave this precept condescended to call the meanest believer his *brother*, and to treat him as such. He also declared, that the refusal of a charitable and Christian office, to one of the least of these his brethren, will be a cause of rejection in the last and awful day.

How, then, can the congregation believe that the man who surveys it with a proud,

supercilious look, and a haughty, disdainful air, notwithstanding he may have put on the garb and occupied the place of a minister, is, in reality, a disciple of Christ? Such a stranger the sheep will not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers. Here they can discern no imitation of Christ, no edifying example. Here is a domineering figure, the image of a heathen despot, for which there is not an appropriate niche in the temple of God.

St. Paul charges the Christian minister—*Thou, O man of God! flee these things; and follow after godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.* (1 Tim. vi. 11.) He also directs, that *the servant of the Lord must be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.* (2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.) Our Lord inculcates upon the stewards and ministers of his church the duty of humility, in opposition to the haughty pride of the Scribes and Pharisees; who love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.—*Be not ye called Rabbi; for one is*

your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren. He that is greatest among you shall be your servant. Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he only that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Matt. xxiii.)

St. James earnestly exhorts that, in things which pertain to the ministration of religion, no distinction should be made between the rich and the poor:—*My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here, under my footstool; are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. (James, ii. 1—6.)*

The members of the church, both ministers and people, are commanded by another apostle—*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.* (Rom. xii. 10. 16.)

And again :—*In lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation—descended from his heavenly rank and dignity—and took upon him the form of a servant.* (Phil. ii. 3—7.)

And lastly, St. Peter, in the verses subsequent to our text, thus continues his exhortation :—*Yea, all of you, be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

From all which it evidently appears, that in these virtues of meekness and humility, as in all other Christian graces, the minister

of Christ is indispensably required to shew an edifying example to the flock. And how can he discharge this obligation, who carries himself *as a lord over God's heritage*; who feels himself exempt, by his rank, by his academical honours, by his superior wealth, or by the prerogative of his station, from the great duty of *condescending to men of low estate*? His pride restrains him from copying the pattern and obeying the precepts of his Saviour. He can neither follow the steps nor the instructions of his Lord's apostles. His character, therefore, is by no means calculated to promote the improvement, or to preserve the integrity, of the church. Though it be still the duty of the flock to *observe, and do what he bids them observe*, they can hardly recognise in his person the servant of their blessed Master, since, under his ministry, they are almost precluded the means of spiritual advancement. And the evil consequent upon this, is much to be deplored. If the uninformed, the wavering Christian, apply to his pastor for counsel and instruction, he is repelled by a look of disdain, or silenced by a short and haughty reply. In this

distress, it becomes his obvious resource to withdraw to some separate meeting-house, for the purpose of worshipping *the unknown God*. Here he is admitted by the teacher, as a being of the same species, and cherished as a brother. His pastor is too much engaged in schemes of self-importance, to seek, or even to have missed, the poor *strayed sheep*. But God will require his flock, at the hand of such shepherds as these. Let us, then, my brethren, with heartfelt conviction of the high and awful responsibility of our station, *lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.* (Heb. xii. 1, 2.)

Let it be our stedfast aim, with diligence, fidelity, and singleness of heart, to feed the flock of God which is among us, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly ; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind ; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock : that thus, *when the chief Shepherd shall*

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*appear, we may receive a crown of glory that
fadeth not away.*

God grant that each of us may be en-
titled to this reward of our labours, through
his mercies in Jesus Christ our Lord!—
Amen.

SERMON XV.

TITUS, I. 5.

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.

WHEN our Lord first published his Gospel to the world, he did not peremptorily insist upon the immediate and unconditional assent of the multitude, but patiently proposed and proved the truth, *to him that had ears to hear*—to him only who could divest himself of contrary prejudices, receive his doctrine with an unbiassed mind, and hold himself open to conviction. This being the description of those persons upon whom alone argument and evidence can duly operate, I would be understood to address myself to them, whilst I take occasion, from the words of St. Paul, to consider some objections which have been made to the condition of our national church. Men of

considerable information have asserted—
“that the establishing of one national church is a thing unauthorised by the word of God; that a mutual co-operation and support, between the civil state and such a church, is inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel; and, that the acknowledgment of any ecclesiastical establishment at all, is detrimental to the general interests of religion.”

And these propositions being assumed as indisputable truths, it has further been declared, *“that no power can be exercised by man over man, in his relative situation towards his Maker; and that conscience is not within the scope of human authority.”*

In order to appreciate the first of these objections, namely, *“that the establishing of one national church is a thing unauthorised by the word of God,”* we must have immediate recourse to that divine word: and here it will be proper for us to consider the condition of the church of Israel, which, as every Christian must acknowledge, was constituted and established under the immediate direction of the Almighty.

In this church we find *one high-priest, one tabernacle of the congregation for all the*

tribes of Israel, *one* ark of the covenant, *one* temple; and all this, by the express ordinance of God, revealed from heaven. Here is, then, one undivided church, established for a whole nation. Let us view the situation of this church at a more recent period of its history. Some ages after ten tribes of the nation of Israel had been removed, for their transgression, out of their native land, the throne and the altar of the two remaining tribes were equally overturned by the king of Babylon. When the Lord brought back his people from the Babylonish captivity, he appointed the replacing of such things as were essentially requisite to the preservation of true religion throughout the community. We do not find, indeed, that he restored the throne: but he commanded and promoted the restoration of the *one* temple, for the whole Jewish nation; and reinstated the *one* high-priest in his sacred authority, as president over the subordinate gradations of the priesthood, who, under him, were compacted into one harmonious body.

Thus it appears, that the establishment of one undivided church, for a whole nation,

under the authority of one hierarchy, is the express ordinance of Almighty God, declared in his sacred word.

But it will be asked, "*What practical reference can we have, as Christians, to the church of Israel? Our rule is not contained in the Old Testament, but in the New.*" Such language we often hear. Since the time that men have assumed a right to teach and receive what doctrines they please, many bold opinions have been advanced relative to the Old Testament. Some have not been ashamed nor afraid to assert, that its authority has been entirely repealed by the Gospel. Let us beware of the delusion of spiritual pride. The Gospel has not annulled *one jot* or *one tittle* of the Old Testament. It is of this book that our Lord has pronounced—*The Scripture cannot be broken*. The ritual ordinances, indeed, which were only *types and shadows of good things to come*, have been discontinued under Christianity, because the substance has appeared. Even these, however, were not removed by the *abrogation*, but the *fulfilment*, of the law; they were of temporary appointment: but those general

laws of good order which had a moral object, and were once enacted by divine authority, have not been removed by that authority. Consequently they remain in force, and are to be obeyed with due accommodation to time and circumstance, but in their genuine spirit.

Accordingly, our blessed Lord, who certainly taught nothing repugnant to the general laws of good order, by which he intended that the consciences of his disciples should be bound, conformed to the rules and discipline of the *one national church of Judah*, even in its degenerate state. He disapproved, it is true, of many abuses which existed in the administration of that church, and of some practices which corrupt custom had introduced; but, as the foundation was pure, this was not a sufficient reason why he should countenance schism, or encourage disorder. He therefore gave his followers an example of conformity, by attending the established mode of worship, both in the temple and in the synagogues. The latter are not to be regarded as rivals of the temple: they were local places of assembly, subordinate to that

one national edifice ; uniting with it in subservience to the great general cause ; but enjoying inferior privileges, and not presuming to infringe upon its higher prerogative.

And our Lord has, upon a particular occasion, shewn his great regard to the discipline of the national church, and his care not to offend against the laws of established order. When he was about to celebrate the feast of the Passover, he did not think it meet to observe this ordinance in one of the cities of Galilee, or in any provincial city of Judah, though the pre-eminence of his character might have sanctioned the act. He went up to Jerusalem for this purpose, notwithstanding the inhabitants of that city had already threatened his life. This perilous journey he undertook in obedience to the precept of Moses, who charges every Israelite—*Thou mayest not sacrifice the passover within any of thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee : but at the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover.* (Deut. xvi. 5, 6.) Thus it became our great Master to fulfil all righteousness ;

and thus it would certainly *become* every one of his disciples.

Our Lord's conformity and precepts of conformity (for such he also gave) to the established church of the Jewish nation, together with the silence of the Gospel as to any intended abrogation of such a general law of good order, afford ample conviction, to a candid and unprejudiced mind, that the same rule is still applicable to the professors of his religion; that, in every nation, under a Christian government, there ought to be an authoritative establishment of his church; and that it is the duty of his disciples to conform to its laws and ordinances, as far as they are consistent with the word of God. But our adversaries are not satisfied with inference, however clear and conclusive. They demand a positive example of the application of this rule to the Christian religion, in the records of the New Testament. This may be thought an uncandid demand, considering that the writers of the New Testament closed the canon long before the Christian religion was publicly adopted by the government of any state. This volume, however, if examined

with a single eye, will be found more full of ecclesiastical regulation than it is generally supposed to be. And here we may remark an example, which is much to the present purpose.

St. Paul, in the words of my text, declares to Titus, *For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting*—or, are hitherto left undone—and *ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.*

Upon this passage we may remark, in the first place, that Crete was a large island, including a nation within itself. It extended more than two hundred miles in length, and contained a multitude of cities, eleven of which were episcopal, in the early age of Christianity. And here we find, in the records of the New Testament, one senior bishop, under Christ our great High-priest, stationed by an apostle, not as pastor of a local congregation, but as president over the whole of this national church. He had authority to make, and therefore to enforce, by the law of good discipline, necessary regulations in the several districts of the island, and to ordain ministers *in every city*; over

which ministers, as it will presently appear, he possessed a superintending power; and consequently his authority extended over all the members of the same united church.

Here is, then, what our adversaries demand, an evangelical record of *one national church*, under one hierarchy, constituted and established by the great apostle of the Gentiles, after the pattern of the church which God had established in Israel, and to which our Lord, by his example and precept, enjoined conformity, as the duty of every true believer who lived within its jurisdiction.

But it will be said, "*The form of this church of Crete was maintained only by the spiritual law of discipline. Here was no alliance between church and state.*"

Those who contend, that a mutual co-operation and support between the civil state and a national church are inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel, generally aim to prove their position by that declaration which our Lord made to Pilate:—*My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered*

to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. (John, xviii. 36.)

These words have been so interpreted, as if they imported a general and perpetual renunciation for Christ himself, and for his church, of all connection with the civil authority of this world. But it cannot, surely, be our Lord's intention, that none of the princes of the earth should ever become his disciples; or that, if any of them were admitted into his church, they must be released from the general obligations of the Gospel, to promote the edification of the mystical body.

The passage has evidently a limited and temporary meaning. *now is my kingdom not from hence*; and it clearly refers to the period of our Lord's humiliation—to a season in which another power prevailed, who declares, in reference to the glory of all the kingdoms of the world, *that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will, I give it.* (Luke, iv. 6.)

To the agents of this potentate our Lord declares, *This is your hour, and the power of darkness.* (Luke, xxii. 53.) Of the same power he says to his disciples—*The prince*

of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. (John, xiv. 30.) Whilst this prince governed the world, well might the Son of God say—*Now is my kingdom not from hence.*

But the prince of darkness was to be vanquished, his kingdom was to be overthrown, and Christ was to be his immediate successor. Consequently, when he is about to engage in the awful conflict, having the glorious victory full in view, he triumphantly exclaims—*Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out!* (John, xii. 31.)

Accordingly, after he had, by his death and resurrection, *cast out* the usurper, and overthrown his dominion, he proclaims *his own lawful authority*—ALL POWER IS GIVEN TO ME IN HEAVEN, AND IN EARTH: *go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.* (Matt. xxviii. 18, 19.)

Thus, before the passion of Christ, his kingdom is not of this world; but after his victorious resurrection, all power in heaven and in earth is given to him. The former clause refers to his humiliation; the latter, to his glorification. From henceforth his

disciples acknowledge him, as *the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.* (1 Tim. vi. 15.)

And, notwithstanding his kingdom was not to appear at first in its full splendour; notwithstanding the partizans of the vanquished adversary were for a long time to support with obstinacy the desperate cause of their master; yet Isaiah has declared that the Messiah's reign shall advance in glory:—*Of the INCREASE of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it, with judgment and with justice, from henceforth, even for ever.* (Isaiah, ix. 7.) And St. John prophetically foresaw the triumphant age of the Gospel, in which *the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever.* (Rev. xi. 15.) It is not easy to conceive how the kingdoms of this world can become the kingdom of Christ, unless they be governed by the principles of his Gospel, and committed to the administration of princes who shall advance the prosperity of his church.

As, therefore, the great adversary was *the prince of this world* only to the period of his overthrow and "expulsion by our victorious Leader; as Christ, immediately after his great victory, claims all power *in earth*, as well as in heaven; as the adherents of the prince of darkness are to be finally subdued, and Christ is to be acknowledged as supreme governor of *the kingdoms of this world*; it is evident that his declarations, *my kingdom is NOT of this world*, and *now is my kingdom NOT from hence*, are to be limited to the period of his humiliation, and to the afflicted age of his servants. We read of no intermediate power between the prince of darkness and the prince of peace, as claiming the kingdom of this world. The rulers of the earth must, therefore, exercise their authority under the influence of the one or the other. And they who deny the kingdom of Christ, must be supposed virtually to acknowledge the kingdom of his adversary.

In what has been here said, I would not be understood to mean, that, under the most prosperous state of the church, the official duties of the civil government, and

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of the priesthood are to be so blended and intermixed, that either may at discretion occupy the place of the other. God is the God of order, not of confusion.

But where temporal and spiritual governors are equally members of Christ's church, the Gospel requires them to co-operate, each in his station and capacity; to unite the powers with which they are lawfully invested, for the promotion of *one* common and sacred cause.

The manner in which this is to be effected, without confusion or usurpation, may be learnt from the history of those kings of Israel and Judah who, in supporting the cause of the established church, and repressing schism and disorder, are declared to have done *that which was right in the sight of the Lord*; for the general rules of God's moral government are invariably the same. He does not approve to-day, what he disallows to-morrow. We shall select, as an example, the reign of Jehoshaphat, because it also demonstrates the evil of departing from this sacred line of duty.

This prince, having been rescued in his infancy from a general massacre of the

seed royal, was patronized by Jehoiada the high-priest, who concealed and educated him in the temple, for the space of six years, and afterwards established him in the lawful throne of his fathers. And it is recorded of him, that when he came to his kingdom, *he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, all his days, that Jehoiada the priest instructed him.* It is, therefore, pleasing to the Lord, that the civil magistrate should attend to the spiritual instruction of his faithful and legitimate priest.

Here, also, we have an account of that orderly controul which, in things circumstantial, the civil magistrate may lawfully exercise over the priesthood, for the good of the church.

The sons of the wicked Athaliah having broken up the house of God, and bestowed its holy vessels upon Baalim, Jehoram commands the priests and Levites to collect money for the necessary repairs of the temple, and to superintend its application. And when he observed that the work proceeded slowly, he called these spiritual officers to account, and concerted a plan

with the high-priest, to enforce the execution of his orders. This, also, was *right in the sight of the Lord* : and hence it appears to be the province, and the sacred duty, of the civil magistrate to interpose his authority in things circumstantial, for the well-being of the church. Thus, the mutual connection between church and state is sanctioned and approved by the word of God.

It is, however, recorded as a blemish in the government of this prince, that *the high places*—the schismatical and idolatrous altars—*were not taken away : the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places.* And when the alliance between the state and the true church was dissolved ; when Jehoiada was dead, and his successors disregarded ; this seed of discord enlarged itself into an impious and fatal apostacy. *The king and his princes left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served groves and idols ; and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for their trespass.* (2 Chron. xxiv. 18.) Jehoash put to death the son of his great benefactor, for reminding him of his transgression : nor did he himself escape

the judgment of God. His enemies prevailed against him, and laid the land desolate; and he was slain in his bed, by a conspiracy of those servants whom he had countenanced in their idolatry. From this history we learn, that the co-operation of the civil and spiritual powers, each in his lawful capacity, in support of true religion, is well pleasing in the sight of God; and that a departure from this mutual duty is the subject of divine wrath, and the cause of public calamity. This unfortunate prince not only contemned the religion of his fathers, but also the sacred and personal engagement under which he ascended the throne: for *Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord, and the king, and the people, that they should be the Lord's people.* He went farther: he took care not to set up a sole arbitrary lord over God's heritage, nor to leave the rights of the sovereignty vague and undefined—he *made a covenant between the king and the people.* We are not warranted to conclude, that, in this act, the high-priest exceeded his commission: for it is recorded of him, that *he did good in*

Israel, both toward God, and toward his house.

The co-operation in the sacred cause, which is thus sanctioned by the approbation of the word of God, was not to be superseded in the prosperous ages of Christianity. It is of these times that Isaiah declares to the church—*Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers.* (Isaiah, xlix. 23.)

There may, indeed, be a community of nominal Christians, which acknowledges no bond of union between civil and spiritual government. Such a state may, for a short period, maintain a tumultuous and disorderly existence, whilst the magistrate pretends to hold an even balance, between God and Belial*, and each of the citizens professes *whatever is right in his own eyes*, and gives it the name of *Christianity*: but we are now speaking of the thing itself, not of spiritual libertinism.

It is not easy to conceive a disunion and

* By the use of this name, I intend nothing more than to describe, in general, that spirit which promotes division and disorder.

want of mutual co-operation between the civil and spiritual powers, in a state where the governors and the governed are equally members of the undivided church of Christ. In this church, all the subordinate ranks are commanded—*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.* (Rom. xiii. 1, 2.) They are put in mind, *to be subject to principalities and powers, and to obey magistrates.* (Tit. iii. 1.) They are again charged—*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or to governors, as unto them that are sent by him, for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well.* (1 Pet. ii. 13, 14.) Here the submission of the people—of the general body of the church—is secured to the governing powers of the state, *lawfully constituted and in the lawful exercise of their respective authority.*

If the prince, the magistrates, and the legislative body, be infidel or heretical, a

reciprocal support of the church is hardly to be expected from them. But there is no sacred law which withholds from kings, lawgivers, and magistrates, the privilege of being sincere disciples of Christ, and members of the one apostolical church. And if such they are, they have, by their profession, subjected themselves to the positive laws of the Gospel, which commands all Christians alike; each in his station, and according to the power which God hath given him, to maintain the faith, the order, and the good discipline, of this church.

Here all ranks are subjected to one common rule of mutual dependance and co-operation. *We are all members of one body*, and every member has its appropriate office, in promoting the general good. *The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor, again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you.* It is so ordered, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members SHOULD HAVE THE SAME CARE *one for another.* (1 Cor. xii. 21--25.)

How, then, can it be maintained, that the Gospel does not authorise an alliance between church and state, when it views

the governors and the governed as dependent members of one individual body ; and prescribes to each member his relative duties in the promotion of one general cause—the edification of the undivided body of Christ? With his Gospel, such a doctrine can never be made to harmonise.

Whatever, therefore, our modern luminaries may hold forth, it is not consistent with the logic of the New Testament to affirm, that those kings, magistrates, and legislators, who are constituent *members of the church of Christ*, can have no right to promote the welfare and guard the safety of that church ; that the ministers of the Gospel, who are *members of the state*, are not in duty bound to support the state ; and, that the same body cannot exhibit its due symmetry, and maintain its own integrity, till its several members be utterly disjointed from one another, and each set apart as an independent mass.

The language of the Gospel is, by far more simple and intelligible. It enjoins unity, harmony, and co-operation, amongst all the members of the church of Christ, whether they be civil or spiritual officers, whether

they be nobles or peasants ; and declares that—*Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation ; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.* (Matt. xii. 25.)

In vain, then, shall the civil magistrate aim to hold an even balance between Christ and Belial. Christ will not accept of a divided heart ; and if the smallest portion be given to his adversary, he will soon engross the whole.

To those who still insist upon the argument drawn from our Lord's renunciation of an earthly kingdom, I would beg leave to propose two plain questions—Did Christ mean, by those words, that none of the princes and governors of the earth should ever embrace his religion? Or did he mean that, if they should embrace it, they were to be tacitly released from the great duty of maintaining, to the utmost of their power, the general principle of union in the church, the purity of the faith, and the laws of good order, which he publicly prescribed *to all his disciples*?

If these questions cannot be answered in the affirmative, we must still be allowed to

maintain that, as the allegiance of the subject to the government of the state is an indispensable duty of the Gospel, so the patronage and protection which Christian governors afford the church are agreeable to the laws of Christ; and the alliance between church and state, as far as it obtains in our land, is sacred and evangelical.

In what has been said above, I have partly answered the third great objection to the condition of our national church; namely, *that the acknowledgement of any ecclesiastical establishment at all is detrimental to the general interests of religion*: but it may be proper to bestow upon it a more particular attention. How far the rejection of that law of good order, which God has appointed in his church, may conduce to promote the general interests of religion, is a circumstance which we may learn from the history of the same people of Israel. This favoured race, as worthy patterns to some of our modern Christians, thought meet to set aside the divine ordinance, and *do, every man, that which was right in his own eyes*. They forsook the place which the Lord had chosen to put his name

there ; and, for the professed worship of God, but in direct opposition to his commands, set up their separate altars in every city, in the high places and in the groves. These altars being founded in rebellion, their erection could not be justified without the gross perversion and the consequent rejection of the divine law. They were served by an irregular and self-constituted priesthood, whose ministry originated in fanatical or impious presumption. This presumption was indulged to the gradual introduction of idols, and every abominable rite ; so that those erections which some thought proper to describe as *altars of the Lord*, became, at length, the avowed altars of false gods, the creatures of human imagination.

The corruption of religion was accompanied, in its progress, with the corruption of morals. As men advanced in the wild schemes of fanaticism, they made correspondent improvements in the perpetration of every crime, till God was provoked to remove his church and his people out of the good land which he had given their fathers. So much did it prove to the general interests of religion, or of civil govern-

ment, for men to disallow an ecclesiastical establishment, to reject the declared ordinance of God, and *walk, every man, after the imagination of his own heart.* And that the same insubordinate mode of proceeding has no tendency to advance the interest of the Christian religion, is a fact which may be concluded from the tenor of St. Paul's instructions to the first bishop of the church of the Cretians, relative to that one national and episcopal church over which he had made him president.—*A bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God : not self-willed ; not soon angry ; not given to wine ; no striker ; not given to filthy lucre ; but a lover of hospitality ; a lover of good men ; sober, just, holy, temperate ;* HOLDING THE FAITHFUL WORD AS HE HAS BEEN TAUGHT, THAT HE MAY BE ABLE, BY SOUND DOCTRINE, BOTH TO EXHORT AND TO CONVINCe THE GAIN-SAYERS. *For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers—whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians*

are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; not giving heed to Jewish fables, and COMMANDMENTS OF MEN, THAT TURN FROM THE TRUTH. Unto the pure, all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving, is nothing pure; BUT EVEN THEIR MIND AND CONSCIENCE IS DEFILED. They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him; being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate. (Titus, i. 7, &c.) Such are the precise qualifications requisite in a steward of the apostolical church; such his province, to maintain the principles and established order of that church, as essential to the general interests of religion; and such his authority to reprove and restrain those teachers, and those doctrines, which, *as we are told in our days*, it is the duty of Christians to countenance and indulge.

But it seems, according to the modern creed, that the *steward of God* has no lawful authority at all: for the propositions I have already remarked being assumed as indisputable truths, it has further been con-

fidently declared—“*that no power can be exercised by man over man, in his relative situation towards his Maker ; and that conscience is not within the scope of human authority.*”

However fashionable such language may be, or however melodiously it may sound in modish ears, as far as it tends to the subversion of ecclesiastical authority, it is perfectly antichristian. It cannot be supported by the Gospel. It is directly contrary to the laws of Christ, and to the appointment of his apostles ; as fully appears from the quotation I have just made, as well as from a multitude of other passages.

Let us, however, consider the subject a little more at large. And, first of all, let me ask, *What is meant by religion ; and where are the grounds of its obligation ?* If the faith, which religion demands, arise solely from the natural and common apprehension of mankind ; if the duties it enjoins consist altogether of *voluntary humiliation and will-worship* ; if nothing of precision in these matters has been ascertained by learning and reflection—nothing specifical taught and commanded by divine revelation ; then

every man may plead a right to make his own untutored conscience the great standard of his religion; and he needs look no further: *and if*, as we are taught in the next class of philosophy, *conscience is the mere child of education*, the modern religionist may safely reject its futile admonitions, and resolve to be a *devout infidel*.

But if the cultivated reason of man has ascertained the truth of certain principles, and the obligation of particular duties, then it is evidently requisite that conscience should attend to the voice of reason, in order to have a right apprehension of those principles and those duties. Consequently the ignorant and uninformed cannot safely resign himself to the guidance of his own fancy, which he may dignify with the name of *conscience*, whilst he neglects the external duty of seeking and submitting to instruction. He cannot pretend to worship God with a *good* conscience, unless he be willing, and disposed, to receive information from the well-advised.

Let me be supposed, in order to illustrate this subject, to address myself to a proprietor of the soil.

The labourers whom you employ upon your estate may be duly qualified to execute the work that is regularly put into their hands, though they have neither skill nor authority to plan for themselves. It is, therefore, their place to come to the steward for direction. If they neglect this duty, and occupy themselves in some absurd or pernicious scheme of their own device; if they turn up the wheat which you had sown in its due season; and substitute a crop of tares; if they cut down the trees in your plantation, to make room for a dung-hill; they may still plead, *We did what we thought for the best*: but you would hardly deem them *good* and *conscientious* servants, nor would you direct your steward, in future, to let the men have their own way.

But, to proceed one step further:—If the revealed word of God has fixed and determined the principles and the duties of religion, it surely follows, that no professed believer of that word, and therefore no Christian, can pretend to worship God in a *pure conscience*, unless he be sincerely disposed to submit his own judgment and his own will to the revealed truth, and the

divine laws declared in the holy Scripture. Will worship, without unshaken confidence in the declarations of God, and uniform obedience to his laws, cannot constitute true religion, as appears from the language of the prophet :—*Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken, than the fat of rams: for rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.* (1 Sam. xv. 22, 23.) I am, therefore, at a loss to conjecture, what we are to understand by the conscience of that man who professes himself a *Christian*, and yet refuses to receive the truth, and to acknowledge the laws of God as they are set forth in the holy Scripture. In this particular, I would thank some of our Christian philosophers to define their own meaning.

If a man is determined to be a *Christian*, in reality, to receive and to obey the laws of Christ, he will go to the Gospel to learn and to study those laws. There he will find, that civil and ecclesiastical authority are equally established and ratified, that in

the quality of a Christian he is as much under government as in the quality of a citizen; and that *man*, by the express appointment of Christ, is *authorised and commanded to exercise a superintending power over man, in his relative situation towards his Maker*. Christ has not only enacted laws for the government and regulation of his subjects, but has also provided for the administration of those laws. To this end he has constituted and appointed spiritual magistrates in his church, whom he has invested with powers, adequate to the due discharge of their episcopal office. This is the constitution of the Gospel. Who will dare to appeal to the Gospel for proof of the negative? or, what Christian will remove his cause from the tribunal of the Gospel, to the jarring courts of philosophy? And, whatever philosophers may say or imagine, the evangelical rule is founded no less in the nature of man than in the laws of God. For, as the truths and the duties of religion arise not from the vague cogitations of the human mind, but are fixed, determined, and declared, by a superior mind; as no doctrine of religion is

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sacred, no act of devotion obligatory, merely because a man may fancy that they are so, but because they are taught and enjoined by the laws of God; it must be essentially requisite to the very attainment of religion, that those laws should be known, acknowledged, and obeyed. This cannot uniformly take place, without an appointment of proper persons to teach, to inculcate, to administer, and to censure. And each of these acts implies authority.

For man is not that perfect being which must necessarily perceive what is true, what he ought to do, and what to avoid, by the immediate and spontaneous intuition of his own mind: nor is his will so determined by the laws of rectitude, that he must necessarily follow the right path as soon as he perceives it: his ignorance requires instruction, and definite direction; his infirmity demands authoritative and vigilant superintendence.

If this be not the case, let the contrary be proved, by an example in civil life. Suspend the laws of the state, and the authority of magistrates, that men, having an unrestrained liberty of judgment and of

conscience, may, by following their pure and unbiassed dictates, become more loyal and orderly subjects, more liberal contributors to the support of government, more honest dealers, better neighbours. Every man perceives the hazard and absurdity of such an experiment.

But if good order in society is not to be attained and secured without laws both definite and of general obligation, and without active magistrates to put them in force; and if we also find in the Gospel spiritual laws equally definite, and as strongly sanctioned with a provision made for their authoritative administration—and such things there are; we must receive it as a demonstrative argument, that the same rule, as founded in the nature of man, applies equally to civil society, and to the affairs of the church of Christ.

Should the philosopher still deny my proposition, let him try the experiment upon the regiment which he commands. Let him suspend the authority of his officers, and withdraw his own. Let him say to the men—“*Your own minds suggest the duties of your profession. I therefore leave*

your judgment, your conscience, and your will, at perfect liberty; that, under their unbiassed influence and direction, ye may form yourselves into an orderly, well-disciplined body of soldiers, the ornament of the service, and the able defenders of your country."

Should he be restrained from this trial by a regard to personal safety, let him have recourse to his own children. Let him conduct them into his library, and tell them,—*"Here are books. Your own minds must lead you to the pursuit of useful knowledge. I appoint no master to superintend your studies, that the guidance of reason and conscience may be liberal and free; that you may be at liberty to make a choice, and form an opinion of your own."*

These self-tutored babes may, perhaps, attain an eminence in philosophy not inferior to that of their liberal parent. They may even acquire some notions of religion. They may learn to combine a flighty devotion with infidelity, a determined zeal with general doubt, and a scrupulous conscience with a spirit of disobedience. As they grow up in years and absurdity, they may

astonish the world, as noisy and confident orators, the broachers of some novel system equally repugnant to the laws of God and to the nature and condition of man ; but it will not be an easy matter to make out their claim to the character of good Christians, orderly subjects, and useful members of society.

To conclude.—It is evident, on the one hand, that undisciplined man is not qualified for the regular discharge of his obligations to God, or to his neighbour ; and, on the other, that Christ has established a sacred law of order for the government of his church ; it is therefore the undeniable *privilege* and *duty* of a Christian people, in which the governors and the governed are equally members of that church, to maintain its principles, support its interest, and enforce its discipline. At the same time, they are neither to forget their *duty* to those that differ from them, nor the *measure* of that duty. All men are to be treated by Christians with impartial justice and gentle clemency ; but the orderly and inoffensive alone are entitled to encouragement and approbation. Whilst we remember that it

is God's province; not ours, *to judge them that are without*—to inflict punishment, or exalt the banner of mercy, as to his infinite wisdom shall appear most meet, on those who have erred and strayed from his church, we must beware of betraying the sacred cause committed to our trust, by an indiscreet confidence and mistaken liberality.

SERMON XVI.

OF THE DUTY OF PROVIDING FOR THE RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION OF THE POOR.

MATT. XI. 5.

The poor have the Gospel preached unto them.

OUR blessed Lord improved every opportunity of impressing upon the minds of men this sacred truth—that the doctrine which he taught was from above; and was, therefore, to be received in its purity and simplicity, unmixed with the vanity of human imagination. And this is particularly the scope of the words which I have now read, and which he pronounced upon the following occasion.

When John the Baptist had heard, in the prison, of the mighty works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples to ask him, *Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*—Art thou the Messiah that was to appear in the world for the redemption

of his people, and whose way I was sent to prepare? Our divine Master, whose glory it was that *he bore not witness of himself*, instead of simply answering in the affirmative, produces the evidence of those miracles which he wrought in his Father's name, in which John might not only perceive the immediate hand of God, but also the accomplishment of the ancient prophecies, relative to the office and character of the Messiah. Accordingly, he dismisses the messengers with this charge:—*Go, and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see.—The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk: the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear: the dead are raised up; and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them. And blessed is he who soever shall not be offended in me.*

The tenor of this history furnishes a clear inference, that the several particulars here enumerated were eminent marks of the Messiah's character, such as must have produced in the mind of John a firm conviction of the identity of his person; and that this was the case; more especially with that circumstance which finished the climax:

of our Saviour's works of mercy *the poor have the Gospel preached unto them.* And, indeed, this must have forcibly reminded the Baptist of some remarkable prophecies, which described the great Redeemer in the execution of his office.

Of him the royal psalmist had declared—

He shall judge the poor of the people: he shall save the children of the needy. (Psal. lxxii. 4.)

Isaiah had testified of that *branch* which was to grow out of the root of Jesse—

With righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity the meek of the earth, (Chap. xi. 4.) And, again, the same prophet thus speaks in the person of Christ:

—*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, be-*

cause the Lord hath anointed me TO PREACH

GOOD TIDINGS UNTO THE MEEK; he hath

sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to

proclaim liberty to the captives, and the

opening of the prison to them that are bound

—to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Chap. lxi. 1, 2.)

Such is the passage which our Lord himself recited in the synagogue at Nazareth, declaring to his audience—*To-day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.* (Luke, iv. 21.) From the recollection of such

scriptures as these, John must have readily acknowledged, that the preaching of the Gospel to the poor was an office which eminently pertained *to him that was to come.*

And this manifestation of the character of Christ, which he places in the highest rank amongst his works of mercy, is in a manner peculiar to the anointed of the Father, and to his faithful disciples. The prophets who lived in succeeding ages had been commissioned to perform many of the miracles here recited. They had restored the lame, they had cleansed the leper, they had even raised the dead; but where do we find them preaching the Gospel to the poor? Their message is generally addressed to the princes and rulers of the people. And as to all other teachers of wisdom, we find them adapting their discourses to those ranks in society which they regard as the best judges of their eminence in learning and philosophy. The love of fame, and the vanity of self-importance, being the great springs of their labours, they either despise the poor, or else address them merely for their own ends. To obtain the admiration of the multitude, and a long train of pro-

selytes to a favourite scheme, they sometimes condescend to preach to the populace; but they preach themselves, instead of the Gospel of peace. So incompatible with the indulgence of human vanity is the faithful discharge of this office, from the motives of extended charity and pure benevolence, that, even amongst those who profess the true faith of the Gospel, no duty is oftener overlooked and neglected than the religious instruction of the poor.

But as the preaching of the Gospel to the meek of the earth is an office peculiarly reserved for the Son of God, and for his faithful disciples, so it is a thing most worthy the appointment of that universal Father, in whose sight all ranks of men are equal, that those whom he has placed in a condition which precludes the opportunity of enquiring for themselves should be faithfully instructed in their duty to God and to their brethren—should have those *glad tidings* proclaimed to them which open their way to immortal happiness. And to whom does the care of providing for their religious instruction so properly devolve, as to those more opulent Christians who are

taught, by the faith they profess, to acknowledge the superior advantages which themselves enjoy, as talents committed to their charge, for the due improvement of which they are accountable to their common Benefactor? The poor are the younger children of Providence, committed, during their present minority, to the patronage and protection of the affluent. If, therefore, the Christian who enjoys this world's good seeth his brother have need, without putting forth a helping hand; if he neglect the trust reposed in him by his divine Master; if he abandon the duty of leading the indigent into the path of righteousness; how can he pretend that the love of God dwelleth in him—how can he hope for the blessing of God, upon himself, his family, and his estate—or how can he expect faithful service and orderly submission from the poor, whom he hath defrauded of their equitable claim? We have seen that the charitable office here recommended—an office which so eminently displays, in its appointment, the goodness of the Supreme Being—was reserved for the Son of God, as a proof and attestation of his divine mission. And we, my brethren,

name ourselves by the name of Christ: we acknowledge that *he left us an example*, for the express purpose *that we should follow his steps*. Must we not, then, feel it our indispensable duty, as far as it is in our power, to promote that benevolent design which is the peculiar characteristic of our holy religion.

And if we are truly impressed with the feeling of our duty in this respect—if we are piously resolved to follow the steps of our blessed Lord—it will be expedient, in the next place, to consider in what way we can promote the benevolent design of preaching the Gospel to the poor. And here, two great branches of duty immediately present themselves. The first is, that of providing for the religious education of *ALL* the children of the indigent. The second is, that of duly accommodating the poor in general, at the time of public worship, in the established church, and promoting their regular attendance.

As to the nature and extent of that religious education which is meet to the condition of the poor, and to which they have a sacred claim from their Christian brethren,

it ought surely to comprehend that degree of early information which will render them competent to the right apprehension of the doctrines, the duties, and the sanctions of Christ's religion;—the setting a rule before them, by which they may be enabled to walk, so as to please Almighty God, and to conduct themselves honestly and righteously in the sight of men.

To the attainment of this end, something more is required than a mere ability to read the Holy Scriptures in their native language. The Bible put into the hands of the poor, without due instructions how to use it, without comment, or with such comments only as tend to pervert its sacred design, can be productive of little general good. To them it must still remain a *sealed book*, unless they be accurately taught the principles of the Christian faith, and the great duties of Christian morality, or religious obedience.

These things, with due regulation, might be obtained in schools of the same kind as those which are locally supported for this purpose by the beneficence of individuals. But, whilst a few distinguished benefactors

of the poor and needy *let their light shine before men*, it is still to be regretted, that, for want of a general co-operation, their benevolent design can neither be rendered perfect in its kind, nor duly extended.

Under private patronage, duly qualified teachers cannot be always procured, nor can local superintendants be appointed, or necessary rules enforced. Into the benevolent seminaries thus established, ALL the children of the poor cannot be admitted. And till this can be done, vice will communicate its infection. Those who have learnt better things, will be corrupted by their miserable associates, who are still abandoned to a state of profligacy and ignorance.

And here it is to be deplored, that, amongst the more opulent, even in a Christian land, there are those who, not content with a silent dereliction of their duty, have set up pleas of justification for withholding the mite of charity. We have heard it confidently objected, that if the children of the poor were taught to read, they would only abuse their education;—that they would either addict themselves to the perusal of profane and seditious pamphlets, or else

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would feel themselves elevated, by their learning, above the proper duties of their station.

That a mere qualification to read might occasionally be thus abused, we may reasonably infer, from examples which have occurred in the higher ranks: but a well-grounded religious education would not be often abused, especially if it were extended to the people at large. And should profane or dangerous books be put into the hands of the poor when they have been taught to read, it would become the part of a wise legislature, and a Christian government, to restrain the circulation of such writings. This could not be deemed an unwarrantable infringement of the liberty of the press. The commandments of God, and the duty of Christians, are not to be superseded by a tenderness to the insubordinate prepossessions of men.

As the case now stands, we find that the ignorance of the poor is not a sufficient guard against profligacy or disaffection to the government. Reading is an attainment possessed by many whose vice and idleness have depressed them into the lower

order of society. Such characters are so universally disseminated throughout the community, that they have, in every city, in every town, in every hamlet, an opportunity of mixing with the illiterate poor. These are the persons most likely to propagate profane and dangerous principles. And who will maintain that they are less likely to gain proselytes amongst an uninformed multitude, who scarcely know right from wrong, than they would be in an orderly populace, who should have been taught, why magistrates are to be obeyed; and why every man is required to live piously, righteously, and soberly, and to do his duty in that state of life in which God shall have placed him? Can it be maintained, with any plausibility of argument, that uninstructed heathens will make better servants, more honest neighbours, or more worthy members of society, than conscientious Christians? Will he who worships HE KNOWS NOT WHAT be less exposed to the errors of fanaticism, or to the danger of disuniting the hopes of devotion from the duties of righteousness, than the man

THE END OF THE SECOND VOLUME

who has been taught to worship God in spirit and in truth.

We are often shocked at the horrid instances of vice and profligacy which are found in the lower orders of the people. Their sins will most assuredly be visited *somewhere*. If they have been duly instructed in the ways of holiness, in their duty to God and man, they cannot but be aware that the danger lies at their own door: if they have not received that religious instruction which, in a Christian country, they ought to receive, it is certain that their more enlightened neighbours participate in the iniquity of their crimes, and must, therefore, expect a share of their punishment: for thus the Lord hath declared—*When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die: if thou dost not speak to turn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but HIS BLOOD WILL I REQUIRE AT THINE HAND.* Nevertheless, if thou warn the ~~wicked~~ of his way, to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall ~~die in his iniquity~~; ~~BUT THOU HAST DE-~~ LIVERED ~~THY~~ SOUL. (Ezek. xxxiii. 8, 9.)

Let each of us, therefore, my brethren, as we would deliver our own souls, contribute our best endeavours to promote the religious instruction of the poor, especially of the rising generation.

But another great branch of our duty is, that of providing for the accommodation of the poor in general, at the time of public worship, in the established church, and promoting their regular attendance.

In our great cities and populous towns, multitudes of the inferior classes are, at present, under a necessity of absenting themselves from the service of the church, for want of room to receive them; and have therefore no resource, but either to betake themselves to the separate conventicles, or to live without religion, and *without God in the world*. And, as the influence of the town gradually extends to the country, the pernicious habits which thus arise from necessity are making daily advances in every corner of our land.

This national evil is not to be cured without a considerable sacrifice, which it is hoped a liberal people will cheerfully offer, in order to sanctify their worldly possessions. And

here we must remember, that acts of beneficence to the poor are not things indifferent, which are left to the option of the individual, either to do, or to leave undone. They are claimed by the Lord, as a debt due to himself, for the blessings he has already conferred upon us. For thus he commands every true Israelite:—*If thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee, then thou shalt relieve him; yea, though he be a stranger or a sojourner; that he may live with thee. Take thou no money of him, or increase: but FEAR THY GOD; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase. I am the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God.* (Lev. xxv. 35—38.) As much as if the Almighty had said—I found you in poverty and in bondage; from these I freely relieved you, and bestowed upon you a fruitful land, and all the blessings of prosperity. In return for these favours, I claim your beneficence to the poor and distressed, whom I take under my own protection.

in relieving them, ye will honour me; Hence it is said by the wise king of Israel—*He that oppresseth the poor, reproacheth his Maker; but he that honoureth him, hath mercy on the poor.* (Prov. xiv. 31.) And the Lord himself has declared—*Them that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed.* (1 Sam. ii. 30.)

But, because the nature of man is such that he cannot be, at all times, steadily attached to his duty by the recollection of past favours, we are further assured that beneficence to the poor is the requisite condition upon which we are encouraged to hope for the future blessing of God, upon all our worldly affairs. Thus it was, at the establishment of the church of Israel:—*If there be among you a poor man, of one of thy brethren, within any of thy gates in thy land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother; but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him.—Thou shalt surely give him; and thine heart shall not grieve when thou givest unto him: because that, FOR THIS THING THE LORD THY*

GOD WILL BLESS THEE IN ALL THY WORKS, AND IN ALL THAT THOU PUTTEST THINE HAND UNTO. This blessing we shall always have the opportunity of procuring: for, as it follows—*The poor shall never cease out of the land; therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, thy poor, and thy needy, in thy land.* (Deut. xv. 7—11.) And, in recollection of this promise, Solomon hath declared—*He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord: and that which he hath given will he pay him again.* (Prov. xix. 17.)—*He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.* (Prov. xxii. 9.)—And—*He that giveth to the poor shall not lack.* (Prov. xxviii. 27.) This promise of reward, even in the present state, is confirmed by our blessed Lord; who has also directed, that our acts of charity should not be performed with vain ostentation.—*When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly.* (Matt. vi. 3, 4.) Nor need any one to be discouraged from

aspiring after this heavenly recompense ; since the same divine teacher has placed it within the reach of the most humble amongst us ; having declared that, *Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, shall in nowise lose his reward.* (Matt. x. 42.)

The duties of religion advance in their importance, and enforce their claim to our attention, in proportion to the greatness of the reward annexed to their performance, as well as to their salutary effects upon human society. And our acts of kindness to the poor have the promise of a glorious reward, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.

Our Lord, in describing the awful process of that great day when the Son of Man shall come in his glory with his holy angels, and all nations shall be gathered before him to judgment, addresses his true followers in these gracious words :—*Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, from the foundation of the world : for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat ; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink ; I was*

a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. (Matt. xxv. 34—36.) Christ had not, personally, received these charitable attentions at the hands of the just; but he explains his own meaning:—*Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* Such is the recompense of beneficence to the poor and distressed. Let him who feels no ambition to merit this reward, by the seasonable boon of charity, open the Gospel in an hour of retirement, and seriously peruse the remainder of this solemn passage.

To most of the duties here specified, the Christians of this land have manifested a laudable regard. They have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and visited the sick and the prisoner. But one important duty still remains:—multitudes of our poor brethren are, hitherto, *strangers* in the house of God, and we have not *taken them in*. Nor is their absence from the throne of grace to be wholly imputed to their own neglect:—we have not provided room for them.

This, surely, was not the intention of our

compassionate Redeemer; of him whose great delight it was, *to preach the Gospel to the poor*. He told the humblest of his disciples—*In my Father's house are many mansions*. It is not his will that the meanest of his subjects should be excluded from his house, or from his table.

When he sets forth the condition of his church, under the similitude of a king making a great supper for his son, and inviting many guests, we find the rich men of this world make light of his invitation: then he commands his servant to go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring into his house, the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind. The faithful minister presently returns with the answer—*Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded; AND YET THERE IS ROOM*. (Luke, xiv. 22.) Thus he who expired upon the cross, to procure our admission into heaven, holds out to his poor guests the hope of ample accommodation.

Having promised that the act of receiving the indigent stranger would be acknowledged as done to himself, it might be thought that he could have safely confided in the

care of his more opulent disciples to provide for the reception of the poor and needy. But amongst us, his distinguished followers, in these days of extended charity, in these days of affluence, when the Almighty is *giving us all things richly to enjoy*, the poor are strangers in the house of God, and they are strangers for want of room. The extensive ruins of sacred edifices which remain in our land, furnish ample proof, that in the time of Roman superstition this was not the case. And the separate conventicles which daily rise in our streets appear in judgment against us, and accuse us of woeful apathy in the cause of that religion from which we hope for eternal salvation.

My brethren, we have manifested a general sense of the duty of beneficence. Our various charitable institutions are undeniable proofs, that our conscience is not asleep, and that we are not unmindful of a future responsibility. But still an essential branch of duty is overlooked. This neglect will mar all our acts of charity. Whilst the poor are yet strangers in the house of God, whilst we have neither received them nor provided for their recep-

tion, we ourselves are hastening into the presence of our Judge : and shall we not dread the sentence—*Inasmuch as ye have not done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have not done it unto me !*

With whatever reluctance we now turn our thoughts to the spiritual welfare of the poor, we are assured that we shall all meet them in the day of judgment ; that we shall meet them upon equal terms, divested of all distinction of rank, and affluence, and power. It would, therefore, be matter of common prudence to reflect, in the meantime, whether their presence in that awful day will be to us a subject of joy and comfort, or of affliction and unavailing remorse—whether their offences will be charged upon us in addition to our own, or whether the charity we have shewn to them will come before the face of our righteous Judge, and cover the multitude of our sins.

Such are the motives to liberality, in promoting the spiritual edification of the poor, which are suggested by the Scripture of truth. In addition, I would offer a few remarks to those persons who acknowledge the

influence of worldly prudence and public economy.

When we take our last and melancholy account of those unhappy offenders who have forfeited their lives to the laws of society, we generally find them deplorably ignorant of the fundamental principles of religion. They are also, for the most part, ready to acknowledge that their career in vice had commenced with the profane abuse of the Lord's-day. Hence it is reasonable to infer, that their crimes have arisen from the want of early religious impressions, and the habitual neglect of Christian duties. And, for the prevention of an evil which springs from this source, it must be an obvious expedient to educate the children of the poor in schools of industry, where, together with the doctrines, they should be taught the moral duties of the Gospel; and then to facilitate and inspect their regular attendance at divine worship. Thus they would be trained up as useful members of society. And as crimes can only be prevented by the influence of religion, and industrious habits, this work of charity, duly carried into effect,

would not only secure our persons and families from the danger of nightly violence, but would leave the honest and industrious in the peaceable possession of that property which is now lost to them by the depredations of the profligate. It would also prevent the expence of prosecuting and executing the sentence of the law upon multitudes of the neglected poor, whom its benign influence would reclaim, and prepare for better purposes. And, in cases of less notoriety, it would save incalculable sums, which are now annually applied to the support of those who are indigent, only because they have been suffered to grow up in ignorance and idleness, without religious impressions, or habits of honest industry.

Could all this be confronted with the charge that may be requisite to provide for the religious instruction of the poor, and for their due accommodation in the established church; it may safely be concluded, that the balance would appear in favour of liberality and virtue. But, though the design may be approved, and its usefulness acknowledged, it will be urged that the

present time is most unseasonable to carry it into effect.

There surely never was a time in which every serious Christian was so awfully called upon, as in our days, to the discharge of his sacred duties. If we look upon the surrounding nations, we cannot but acknowledge that *the judgments of God are now abroad in the earth*—the axe is now laid to the root of the trees, and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Why has our land been hitherto distinguished and preserved, amidst the wreck of thrones and communities? Its crimes are great and many: but, in most instances, we have been sensible to the cries of the poor; and we are told that benevolence to them will arrest the shaft of judgment. Is not this the charity that hath covered the multitude of our sins? If so, let charity have its perfect work, and let us confide in the Almighty for the fulfilment of his gracious promises. If we piously acknowledge that we have been preserved by the interposition of the divine Providence, because *a few righteous are left within the*

city, shall we not, as we hope for the continuance of God's favour, contribute our part to increase their number? Shall we not approach the throne of grace with this peace-offering in our hand? God will be more pleased with our charitable act, in bringing the poor into his house, than with all the thanks and praises we can offer him whilst this great duty is left undone.

It is true that, during a long and expensive war, the exigencies of the state have made large demands upon us: but they have not deprived us of our Christianity. We are not, surely, so entirely devoted to the destruction of our enemies, that we cannot afford to give a comparative trifle, to promote the welfare, and save the souls, of our poor brethren. In doing this, we shall sanctify our public expences, and secure the prosperity of our cause: for, *the battle is the Lord's*; and we may hope for his blessing and support, not when we confide in our own strength, but when we attend to our sacred duties, and obey his divine commands.

I leave these reflections upon your minds, with the full persuasion that, if ye are moved

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by a sense of duty to God and man, or by a just regard to your own present and future interest, ye will no longer hesitate to extend the blessing of a religious education to the children of the indigent, or to bring the poor and needy into the one fold of the flock of Christ.

And now let me address myself to you, my humble brethren, whose lot in this world is lowly and depressed. Let me earnestly exhort you, to seek with diligence, and cheerfully to embrace, every opportunity to obtain the knowledge of the Gospel, and sincerely to apply yourselves to its duties; and, above all, not to neglect the means of procuring for your children the benefit of a religious education.

Your station perhaps requires, *that ye should rise early, late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness.* It may be, that, amidst anxieties and perplexities, your utmost exertion of labour and industry procures but a homely and scanty subsistence for yourselves and your offspring. Without religion, where is the comfort of your condition; and where, indeed, the blessing of your existence? But, even to you, religion

offers its comforts. They are great, and they are consoling. Ye will find, in the book of the Lord, that the meanness of your rank is no proof that ye are either forgotten or disregarded by your heavenly Father. Your condition is not meaner than that in which he placed his own beloved Son. He was born in a manger. He earned his bread by labour, as an humble mechanic: and when he went forth to *preach the Gospel to the poor*, he endured hunger and thirst, without a home, without the meanest cottage wherein to lay his head, and without a friend in the world excepting a few poor persons who attached themselves to his company, whose only wealth, whose only comfort, was their religion, and the society of their Saviour. And by these, his faithful disciples, he made it known to the world, that the poorest creature who follows his example shall fare as he now does, in his exalted state, and shall be acknowledged and honoured by him in his Father's kingdom.

Thus it appears, that worldly prosperity is no proof of the favour of God: nor is it a test of happiness even in this life; for the

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apostles of Christ, in the midst of their poverty and affliction, *rejoiced with joy unceasing*. God might, with infinite ease, bestow upon each of us plenty and affluence, if he saw it to be for our benefit. But in this state of trial, our conditions and our supplies, which are all of his appointment, are diversified as it seems best to his supreme wisdom. One man is tried with wealth, another with power and dignity; and woe be to them, if it shall appear, at the great day of account, that they have failed in their probation, and misemployed the talents committed to their trust. Another is tried with poverty and indigence; and religion points out his duty, to acknowledge and submit to the divine appointment, and to cultivate the meek virtues of industry, sobriety, honesty, and humility. If the indigent has not the seducements of wealth and fashion, he has the less temptation to forget his Maker, and to forfeit the blessing of a pure conscience. If his knowledge is circumscribed within narrower bounds than that of others, he has still an opportunity, with due application, of knowing what God requires of him. And the

poor man, who sincerely receives the Gospel as it is given, is in a fairer way of becoming a worthy Christian, than he who is puffed up with the vain conceit of his worldly wisdom.

If the meek of the earth sometimes feel the contempt of the wealthy, and the oppression of the powerful, religion will yet raise them above discontent, and wipe away the tears of anguish from their eyes. For the same Gospel which has prescribed to them the duties of their station, during the night of this transitory life, has also promised, in the morning of the next, a crown of glory that fadeth not away—a rest from their labours, in a state where the lowest shall far surpass the most exalted in this world, and in the enjoyment of immortal happiness, to which the light afflictions of the present life are not worthy to be compared.

Such being the present peace of mind, and the future hopes, which the Gospel proposes to the meanest of our brethren, let us encourage and assist them to lay hold of those inestimable blessings which are set before them: and if any of them

come short of this happiness, let us beware that it is ~~not~~ for want of that seasonable assistance which it is in our power to afford—that *their blood may not be required at our hands*. On the contrary, let us hope, through the divine mercy, that the rich who confer, and the poor who receive, the benefit of religious instruction, shall rejoice together in the kingdom of our heavenly Father.

THE END.



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